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ONCE IN
ENGLAND

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NOVELS :

TELL ENGLAND
ROSSENAL
DAMASCUS GATE
WANDERLIGHT
DAPHNE BRUNO, Vol. I
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MORRIS IN THE DANCE
THE OLD TREE BLOSSOMED
A FAMILY THAT WAS
THE JESTING ARMY
MARY LEITH

PLAYS :

THE BERG ("ATLANTIC")
THE MULTABELLO ROAD
EVENSONG (WITH OWEN RUTTER)

ESSAYS :

THROUGH LITERATURE TO LIFE
THE SHOUT OF THE KING

'ONCE IN ENGLAND'

A NOVEL

COMPRISING :

BOOK I: A FAMILY THAT WAS

BOOK II: THE JESTING ARMY

BOOK III: MARY LEITH

BY

ERNEST RAYMOND



CASELL
AND COMPANY LIMITED
London, Toronto, Melbourne
and Sydney

To
NEWMAN FLOWER
IN GRATITUDE

AUTHOR'S NOTE.

"Once in England" is made up of three books. These books were first published as single novels, each in itself a unity. "A Family that Was" appeared in 1929, "The Jestling Army" in 1930, and "Mary Leith" in 1931. But from the beginning the author saw these books as the parts of a larger whole, which was to relate the fortunes of certain characters during a remarkable curve of England's story. This complete novel—revised and re-set—he now offers, under the title "Once in England"

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BOOK I
A FAMILY THAT WAS

PART I

CHAPTER I

SUNDAY SITS FOR ITS PORTRAIT

THE hour between breakfast's close and church-bell was always a silent space in the long road where the family lived. The pavement kerbs ran straight as railway lines, from their wide beginning, as they turned out of Kensington Road, to their narrow end where they pierced into the vagueness of Uxbridge Road, whose happy transversion at that point, it would seem, alone prevented them from meeting. And in all that vista there was nothing seen except the morning light of Sunday; which, to the English, is a light different from all other lights—a sad, hushing, and faintly disturbing light. And never more so than on this dry, wintry, sunlit morning, in the year 1893, in the winter of the Great Queen.

It was Sunday; and no two-wheeled butcher's chariot rattled behind its cantering pony up to the area gates; no milk float, pushed by the milkman, tinkled its churn and its cans along the gutter and stopped to the cry of "Milko!"; no sedate van from the Army and Navy Stores brought provisions and delicacies to its long array of clients in this decorous road; no closed brougham, purling behind its silky bays, came to fetch Lady Castlewaite (the street's one title) from No. 203; nowhere to-day reeked the apricot-coloured dustcart, with its dustmen in their sou'westers, and its fine inscription "Royal Borough of Kensington;" no top-hatted men hurried down to the city omnibuses in the Kensington Road; no long-skirted ladies, with household cares behind their veils and purses in their muffs, set out to their barter among the deferential tradesmen; and no errand-boy, as he kicked a

stone between pavement and gutter, whistled the new, universal air :

“ After the ball was over,
After the break of morn.”

It was Sunday.

The long road waited in an anticipatory silence for the church bell. Such house-fronts as these, with their spotless hearthstoned steps mounting to porticoes of stucco, and their pretentious little pediments over the windows, *would*, in that year, and under the ægis of the Great Queen, have made proper submission to the church bell. The dust lay quiescent in the sags and the cracks of the pavement-flags where it had blown; and because the horses in those days possessed the streets of London, it was nine-parts hay from the country-side. And this very dust seemed to know it was Sunday. Far up the road, back in the break between the blocks of houses, waited the church of St. Austin's, till it chose to ring its bell. Standing at the bottom of the road, one could not see it with the eyes, but one was seeing it with the mind, just because Sunday filled the street. It was towerless, but its high walls of grey stone and its steep roof gave it an imperious presence; and about its silence now there was an air of especial sovereignty. This was its day and its reign: let the pavements stare up at it as expectantly as they liked, not one second before the half-hour would it sound the Matins bell.

Behind every window in that street, no doubt, was a story well worth the telling, but nine hundred and ninety-nine of these have been shelved into people's memories, where their characters are dimming and their piled chapters are waiting to be destroyed. This is the odd one. And through all those stories that long wide road must run—remembered in many guises but never more clearly than as it lay on Sunday mornings in winter, looking the longer and the wider for its emptiness and its stillness and its dry sunlight. Very straight and clear it will be, if the people whose memories hold it were children on this November day, thirty-nine years ago.

Footsteps tapped into its silence; the footsteps of a single person; light steps but hurried, and ringing unusually loud as they drew near. From the quickness of their beats one would have imagined that they belonged to a tripping girl and would have erred just about as widely as possible, for it was a very little old man with a grey, walrus moustache,

a black overcoat, black trousers and a bowler hat; but he was so spare and sprightly, and so hurried, that his feet could twinkle like a girl's. As he walked he was encouraging himself with words spoken almost aloud: "Come along, dear man. It's getting on. Time's getting on. . . . Cruets . . . Wine and water . . . Paten . . . Bread . . . Violet stoles . . . Come along, dear man; hurry, hurry"; and his hand, to save time, went into his trouser pocket for a key. He turned up an alley by the side of the church and came to a side door. While fitting the impatient key into the lock he found time to read, not without pleasure, a white lettering: "*To Vestries and Crypt. Head Clerk and Verger, Mr. Flote.*" Mr. Flote was sixty; but one does not easily tire of seeing one's name painted on a door.

Entering a vaulted passage that had the curious quality of striking cold and damp even as it sent towards him the warmth of the church's heating system, he hurried along its darkness to a Gothic door which, yielding to another key, admitted him to an oblong cell lit from a shallow, mullioned window, high up in the wall. This was the Verger's own room, or Office; and so long and compressed and lanky was it that it gave the appearance of having resisted and fought the church's architect till he, defeated by its obtuseness, had pushed it, angrily and anyhow, between the large Clergy Vestry and the important Muniment Room. It held a good oak table, a raffish desk, a decrepit armchair, and a gas stove which Mr. Flote hastened to light. Down the whole of its south wall were fixed with drawing-pins the dusty and curling photographs of choir-boys, choirmen, sidesmen and clergy who had worked with Mr. Flote during the last twenty years, and liked him, and given him their pictures on departing. Everyone who entered this room looked along this picture-gallery, and Mr. Flote would leave his desk or his armchair and look along it too, and say contemplatively: "Yes, the dear boys. . . ." and explain who had been who, and what had become of him. Did you ask information of this one or that one, and learn that he had carried his career to the Episcopal Bench, or to Africa, or to gaol, Mr. Flote always began his reminiscences with: "Ah, that dear boy . . . Yes, yes . . . poor, dear boy . . ."

This morning he applied the term to himself: "Come along, dear boy. Fifteen minutes past ten." He removed overcoat

and jacket, and, taking from a hook an old serge cassock, stepped into its skirt, drew on its sleeves, and secured it by the button at the throat. From a cupboard he took the sacred vessels for the Mid-day Communion and a big black bottle; he replenished the cruets with wine and water; he laid a napkin on the paten and cut reverently and carefully some squares of bread into little cubes and placed them on the napkin. Then he put a kettle to boil on a slow trivet of the gas stove, for he was partial to a cup of tea. Then he hastened into the Clergy Vestry and laid the violet stoles on the table, and opened the Preachers' Book at the First Sunday in Advent. Back in the Verger's Office, he put the Banns Book under an arm-pit and his gown over the same arm, and took the cruets in one hand and the chalice and paten in the other, and caught up the front of his cassock-skirt with some spare fingers, and climbed up the stone stairway to the door of the Chancel.

In the lofty, echoing chancel he stepped more quietly, and soon the carpet of the Sanctuary stayed all sound of his feet, as he laid his cruets on the credence table and opened the Office Books on the deacon's and sub-deacon's prayer-desks. Now down the long Chancel he went, putting the Banns Book on the Vicar's stall as he passed, and down the nave between the clustered columns of the arcade, pulling on his gown and buttoning the overdue cassock-buttons. The last button was fixed as he reached the west end of the church and stood by the main doors. He looked at his watch and waited. Already he could hear the people outside the locked doors, and in exasperation muttered aloud:

"He's always late. Always late. I said ten fifteen. I wonder what'd happen if *I* was late. They never think of *that*, neither assistant vergers nor curates nor vicars nor any of the like of them. 'Don't you worry. Flote'll see to all that.' But they'll rely on the little man once too often, I shouldn't wonder. Have a stroke, I might—half an hour before the service; *then* what'd happen? . . ."

So he muttered on one side of the oaken doors, looking repeatedly at his watch; while on the other side shuffled the feet of the assembling people, and their voices whispered together.

This was a parish of fifteen thousand souls, and, to judge from the congregation that would assemble for Morning Prayer, a

fashionable parish; but ten thousand of those souls lived in the poorer streets to the north and knew little of their church. Once, twice, or three times in their lives they established a contact with that big, grey Gothic ark, and then it was necessarily through Mr. Flote as a gateway. Him they knew; they could remember those few times, happy and sad times, when they had been obliged to visit the little white-haired verger with the grey, walrus moustache; and because he had not been unkind to them then, they remembered him with grateful thoughts. Who realized—not the portly and successful vicar, Dr. O’Grogan, and not the curates, churchwardens, sidesmen, district visitors and fashionable congregation—that ten thousand of the parishioners, if they thought of the Parish Church at all, thought of Mr. Flote? And, to be sure, Mr. Flote himself had no such knowledge.

But it was so. In the nature of things it was he who had seen to it that innumerable babies from the surrounding streets had been safely baptized into the faith as he knew it (and in water of an innocuous temperature) on Sunday afternoons when the shadows were long in the aisles; it was he who had shepherded to the altar innumerable panicky swains and brides, there saying their responses for them when they were reduced to speechlessness (so that none could now tell how often Mr. Flote had been married—how many strange women he had accepted as his wedded wives and how many gaping louts he had accepted as his wedded husbands); it was he who had made the antique jest to innumerable giggling bridesmaids, “That it’d be their turn next;” it was he who had first administered to thousands of brides up and down the land the pleasant shock of being called “Mrs.” (for he had a trick, in which he fancied that no one had surprised him, of bottling their husbands’ names in his memory and then, the minute the ceremony was over, saying: “This way, *Mrs. So-and-So*; this way, *Madam*, if you please”); it was he who had given to thousands of minute-old husbands and their attendant best men a happy liberation from nervousness by his loud laugh in the vestry, when he called to them: “Now, dear boy, you’ve got to sign the crime sheet; come along, please;” it was he who had knelt in the Lady Chapel by the side of bewildered young mothers, just out of child-bed, and said their part for them (so that none could now tell how often Mr. Flote had been churchied); and it was he who had often, in the last twenty

years, made comely his church with purple hangings and white flowers for those who had known him at the gate and were now entering it for the last time.

And every evening at six o'clock, down in that crypt beneath the church, where it smelt so vaulty and damp and his peculiar burrow lay huddled between the Clergy Vestry and the Muni-ment Room, a queue of people might have been seen awaiting an audience of him, for they had read in the *St. Austin's Parish Magazine* that Mr. Flote was then at his desk, ready to expound the law as it touched such dark subjects as matrimony and banns and licences, or to issue hospital letters in days of sickness, and bread tickets in days of want.

"Five and twenty past ten," he muttered. "This is later than he's ever bin. It's a scandal."

But then a youth leapt irreverently the three steps of the chancel and ran down the nave, buttoning up his cassock.

"Well!" called Mr. Flote; and most of the reproach in the world nestled in the monosyllable.

"Good morning, Mr. Flote."

Mr. Flote tried sarcasm.

"Perhaps it's the afternoon service you're coming to, George. If so, you're too early. It's at three o'clock, the Children's Service."

"No, it's Matins," assured the youth, tying his cincture.

"Matins, is it? And a lot you've done towards preparing for Matins? Perhaps you're the churchwarden. Perhaps I'm mistaken in thinking you're the Assistant Verger. . . . Why, the congregation's out there, before you've finished your breakfast."

"Yes, 'ark at 'em!" said the youth. "Aren't they in a hurry for a good seat? St. Austin's is getting popular, Mr. Flote."

"It's the attractions of the Assistant Verger, I shouldn't wonder," Mr. Flote suggested.

The big doors shook as someone pushed against them.

"Now just you wait," the youth ordered, in an imaginary address to the people outside. "At half-past ten we open them doors, and not a minute sooner. For Queen Victoria we might open them, but not for you. . . . Eh, what's that?"

A clock gave a premonitory clicking before it rang the two quarters. Mr. Flote straightened his gown and smoothed down his moustache, stroking both its drooping wings. The clock struck.

"Open up, George."

George, who loved, like all boys, this prompt and punctual response to the commands of a clock, shot back the bolts and flung the doors apart. Mr. Flote, standing where all must pass him, smoothed down his moustache again. He was ready to welcome the People of God.

The bell, high up in the church's gable, said "Clink" once, "Clink" again, and then "Clango, clango, clango, clango, clango," without change or intermission. To that long and dignified street, now dotted with worshippers approaching the church, there was always a vague disappointment in the sound of this single bell; it seemed an unworthy sound to come from so superior a pile; it gave to its listeners a tiny shock of personal shame like the shock which comes when a very tall and important gentleman on a platform rises and addresses an audience in a thin little voice, pitched high in his head.

In two houses only did it sound loud and bruisingly, those to right and left of the church. The house to the right was the Vicarage; and now the bell was clanging into its stairways, landings and bedrooms. It clanged into the head of Mrs. O'Grogan, the Vicar's wife, who was at her dressing-table in the second-floor front room. It sent her with a muttered, "Good gracious! *There!*" to the bannisters where in a high-pitched voice to defeat the clangour she called down the well of the staircase: "Children! Children!" and, receiving no answer, raised her voice to a still higher treble and called again: "Children, Children! Are you ready? It's half-past ten."

From a door on the ground-floor a boy of eleven came out and called:

"What?"

"Oh dear! I said, are all you children ready. The bell's begun."

"We had remarked it," said the boy of eleven.

"Well, for goodness' sake see if those children are getting themselves ready, Keith. It's——"

"They are not so employed," said the boy.

"Tut, tut . . . dear, dear . . . well, tell them to, for pity's sake . . ." and she worried back into her room.

"I will do what I can," her son called after her. "I have a predilection towards helpfulness."

This boy of eleven had, it will be seen, an idiom of his own—though hardly his own, perhaps, for there is a period of disastrous humour through which many boys, who are in the higher forms of their preparatory schools and beginning to sip the joys of language, find it pleasant to travel. Boys who are tall and good-looking are particularly likely to seek this happy country where the berries of language are so large and luscious, and to browse among them; and Keith O'Grogan was certainly tall and good-looking. He had dark hair that, because of its slight coarseness, stood off his head in waves; grey-blue eyes in which a lazy humour peeped; and good straight features that promised in time to become the commanding, seigniorial features of Dr. O'Grogan himself. His body was already thinning to lankiness, and now he carried it with something like a cynical weariness into the breakfast room. "Now then!" he shouted to four other children who were busy at play in the room. "Bestir yourselves. The lady upstairs is getting impatient." He took the gun-metal watch from his waistcoat pocket and consulted it. "Yes, the tempus fugit's all right. Look alive, all of you. Equip for Divine Service."

The four children began to lift themselves sulkily from their play.

"Come on! I never speak twice," said Keith, standing at the door like a sergeant.

The tallest of the four children, a girl of nine years and a half, and as handsome as Keith, though her expression was as spontaneously lively as his was studiously languid, came towards the door.

"He's trying to be clever," she scoffed.

"I take no impudence from you, young Joyce," Keith answered. "Go and wash."

Joyce showed him a brilliant red pennon of a tongue and danced from the room. She was followed by a thick-set boy of eight, whose advance into the hall Keith encouraged quite gratuitously, and on the inspiration of the moment, with a kick.

"Hell to you!" said the child.

"Go and wash, young Derek," commanded Keith.

"I shouldn't do it for you," Derek explained from the hall, that his independence, about which he had heard a great deal, might be vindicated. "I do it because I want to."

"You do. You want it badly," Keith agreed.

Derek was followed by Peggy, a little girl of six and a half, who passed her eldest brother with the promptness of a healthy fear. Lastly came Tony, a very small boy of five, with impudent eyes, to whom Keith said, "*Br-r-r-r!*" and feigned a blow, thus shooting him into the hall.

"That's the lot," Keith sighed. "'S'blood! what a crowd!"

Keith, Joyce, Derek, Peggy and Antony—those were the five O'Grogan children. And their ages were eleven, nine and a half, eight, six and a half, and five—eighteen months, or as near as made no difference, dividing each of them. And they came in a perfect alternation—a boy, a girl, a boy, a girl, and a boy—so there was little wonder that Dr. O'Grogan, whose pulpit vocabulary would sometimes stray in from the church next door and invest his dinner-table observations with the grand manner, had more than once given the following address to his guests: "There's a beautiful rhythm about my family. There's something cosmic about such a rhythm, which passes our understanding. It's the rhythm of the tides and the seasons and the stars. Keith, Joyce, Derek, Peggy and Antony—why, it's a perfect work of art. And they pattern off perfectly in other ways. Keith and Joyce, the two eldest, both have brains and make a good pair, for young Joyce has all the liveliness and vanity to meet Keith's *imperium* with a desirable insolence, and so they get on splendidly. And then Peggy and Antony, the two youngest, are much alike in many ways and make another good pair; and meanwhile, young Derek stands in the middle, quite apart, which suits him exactly—for young Derek is as different from the others as chalk is from cheese; he's *sui generis*, completely self-sufficient and completely self-satisfied; going his own way, with no brains, and therefore as conceited as they make 'em. Oh, ho, Derek: I've no fear for Derek's future; brains or no brains, he's certain to be successful in life; no one so cocksure and self-centred could possibly fail."

As if in illustration of this talent for success and this apartness Derek emerged first from the cloakroom, and emerged alone.

"Is it going to be decent this morning?" he asked of his elder brother.

"I will ascertain," said Keith.

And Keith walked up the stairs to the closed door of the first floor front room, which, being the best room in the house, was

the Vicar's study. Here, since the landing was dark, a fortunate hole in the door enabled him to see much that was happening in the sunlit study beyond. He returned with news of what he had seen.

"The sermon will be by Dr. O'G. He's walking up and down with it, and looking out of the window as he spouts it off."

"Oh, bother!" said Derek. "I hoped it'd be the Crab's Farewell Sermon."

"No, it's the dear vicar this morning. And it's pretty sound stuff, I fancy. He looks as though *he* were going to enjoy it, at any rate."

"Does he always learn them by heart?"

"Course he does. He learns them by heart and pretends that he never uses a note. It's a sound scheme."

"Is he going to read the lessons?"

"Does he ever if he's preaching? Idiot!"

"Yes, he does sometimes," retorted Derek, unperturbed and self-confident as ever. "If it's a hot lesson he always bags it for himself. So *bad on!*"

"*Had on!*" was the current expression at Derek's preparatory school for that emotion of triumph which other boys at other times have expressed by "*Sucks!*" If you had defeated your opponent in argument, you were held to have "*had him on,*" and were entitled to announce the fact.

At this point Joyce burst out from the cloakroom, and having heard something of Keith and Derek's conversation, demanded in her bright and lively manner:

"What's the programme this morning, Keatings?"

"Your father's preaching," Keith answered.

"I guessed it! I guessed it! He's preaching at St. Paul's this afternoon, as he's told everybody a million times, so he was certain to try out his sermon on us. That'll mean the Crab'll take the service for the last time, bless his heart!"

"The Crab's no good at taking the service," Derek interpolated, for no other reason, probably, than that it would annoy Joyce.

"Course he is!"

"Course he isn't! Daddy often says so."

"Daddy's probably jealous of him. He's sweeter than any of them, and takes the service beautifully."

"What piffle——" began Derek; but Keith, as the eldest, adjudicated between the combatants.

"He doesn't," he said. "He can't sing for nuts, young Joyce. Your love has blinded your eyes, my child."

"And anyway," added Derek, with his quiet superiority, "the Crab won't be there at all. He's gone away on a preaching job that Daddy didn't want to do, because it wasn't big enough. So *bad on!*—all."

These three elder children were now drawing on their overcoats, Joyce punctiliously, and Keith and Derek indifferently, so that the necks of their overcoats lay at strange inclinations, along their Eton collars. The lining of their preparatory school caps, too, when they put them on, peeped down at the Eton collars. And the double breasts of the overcoats swung unbuttoned, as the boys wandered back into the breakfast-room, leaving Joyce to gaze into the mirror of the hall-stand.

The breakfast room was the room where they had lived most of their lives, if their bedrooms be excepted. It was a fairly large room at the back of the house, overlooking the narrow garden. On its cream wall-paper, striped like a newly-mown lawn, hung some large steel engravings of Doré's pictures and one more recent, of Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee, which had been celebrated six years earlier. On the marble mantelpiece stood several photographs of the family in plush and silver frames, two nondescript brass candlesticks and an ash-tray, and a tall overmantel, elaborate with shelves and mirrors. A large mahogany dining-table with piano legs filled the centre of the carpet, and a green saddle-bag suite stood against the walls. Heavy plush curtains hung from the abraded brass rail above the windows, and gave something of the appearance of a shallow stage to the balcony, whose green boxes, in summer, were gay with scarlet geraniums, white marguerites and blue lobelia. That pink geraniums also should hang in wire baskets from the awning was an offence to Derek, who held that it would be more patriotic to limit the balcony flowers to red, white and blue.

The chequer-board linoleum of the hall was very narrow as it passed the door of the basement and the flank of the staircase; but it spread out into a broader oblong on the space before the front-door. On the left of the front door was the hat-and-umbrella stand, and often several pairs of goloshes, and Keith's cricket bat or hockey stick, and perhaps a toy perambulator belonging to Peggy. On the right were two hard-seated oak chairs for the spiritual or financial invalids

who might await an interview with the vicar. Above these hung a text, "GOD IS THE MASTER OF THIS HOUSE," to which Joyce, this morning, was turning her back, as she adjusted her coat in the hat-stand mirror. To the youngest two children, Peggy and Antony, who were by far the most imaginative, the front door itself was the most clearly marked feature of the hall: about its bolts and its chain, its letter-box which could click with such alarm or such promise, and its leaded lights stained the greens and the blues of the sea's depths, which could darken with the shadows of strange visitants, there was an interest and a fear, and the fascination that is born of these.

Mrs. O'Grogan now called down the stairs to Joyce that she was to see that Peggy and Tony were properly dressed; and Joyce, without giving a glance at the little ones, called back that they were all right; and Keith, from the breakfast-room, shouted a genial "Liar!" and Dr. O'Grogan made an angry emergence from his study, to send a petition both up the staircase and down the staircase that there might be less noise in the house. So Keith, in a subdued voice, summoned the family into the hall, and arranged them according to their heights.

"Little Tony'll go first; and Peggy, you jolly well keep close behind Tony; and Derek close behind Peggy; and Joyce, just you tread on Derek's heels; and you can rely on me to tread on yours. And just you keep close behind each other like that, all the way up the nave; otherwise we shan't get the Organ Pipes effect." He looked at the gun-metal watch. "Hang! It's only a quarter to. It's no good having the Organ Pipes effect unless there's a full congregation to see it. You'd better hoof off for a bit. Here's Mother all ready to go."

Mrs. O'Grogan was descending the stairs: a tall, slender woman in a well-made black-silk dress, a large hat and veil, and drawing on her gloves as she came. In her outdoor dress she seemed a handsome woman, for the veil softened the lines she had worried into her forehead and the look of sad resignation that dwelt in her eyes.

"Where are the children? I thought I asked you to get them ready, Keith. Can you *never* do anything to help?"

"Such is gratitude!" Keith sighed. "They're ready for the fray."

"Well, where are they? and don't call Morning Service a fray."

But Keith was meditating on his hurt, and found it worse than he thought. "'Never do anything to help,'" he repeated. "By jove, that's a bit thick, as thickness goes."

"Oh, don't stand there playing the fool! Where are they? And your coat and cap are all on one side, both of them. Can't you even get yourself ready properly? I don't know what people'd take you for, sometimes; upon my word I don't."

"They'd take me for a gentleman, no matter how I was dressed," answered Keith, very readily, submitting as his mother readjusted his cap and pushed his hair from sight. "But damme! 'Never do anything to help'—after I've been slaving with them! Gorblimey! as thickness goes, it's the thickest thing that ever was. I shan't forget it in a hurry. . . . Yes, they'd know me for a gentleman anywhere, which is more than I should care to say about Derek."

Mrs. O'Grogan, in no humour for his pleasantries, slightly stamped her foot, while she slid a shilling into the palm of one glove, subcutaneously.

"Oh, *don't* stand there acting the fool like that. I've told you not to. Where are the children? . . . Children, children!" she cried, putting her smelling-salts into her muff. "Oh, where are they? Joyce dear! . . . Derek. . . . Peggy. . . . Tony. . . ."

"You'll have your husband out, if you call like that," warned Keith. "He's not in his happiest vein this morning. That's why I sent the kids away. But there you are! I'll round them up if you want them. It's my happiness to oblige."

He gathered them together, with as much delay as possible; but the brake could not be applied for ever, and in due course the family passed into the dry sunlight of the street. The bell was clanging with a slower and more wearied rhythm now, as if it knew that the end of its long exercise was at hand. And there were only a few people on the pavements approaching the church, because people needed to come early who wanted a good pew in St. Austin's, Kensington, during the ministry of Dr. Ernest O'Grogan. In the far distance the brougham of Lady Castlewaite was returning to its mews; no other vehicle could be seen, for not many of the congregation, though it accounted itself well-to-do, were among the "carriage-folk." The long wide road was taking back the emptiness and the sabbath silence which for another hour must occupy it—a

silence only heightened by the dim, imprisoned murmur of a congregation singing.

In the vestibule, after sundry grimaces of Keith's, the children fell into his prescribed order; and here was Mr. Flote, in cassock and gown, smiling a welcome to them. Mr. Flote always looked forward to the entrance of the Vicarage family; they came rather late, when every seat in the nave was filled except the roped-in Vicarage pew, and thus the church's central alley was free for him to conduct them in an important little procession, as was proper, down through the hushed respect of the congregation to their royal seat in front. It was the most impressive event before the service. This morning with a step becomingly slow he brought them, as usual, into the centre of the parochial picture; but he did not, know, never turning his head, that they were coming in an especial formation; Tony first; then Peggy, a little taller; then Derek, a little taller yet, and self-assured and unsmiling; then Joyce, a little taller and inclined to giggle; then Keith, the tallest of them all; then the tall, thin, tired mother; a perfect similitude of an ascending series of organ pipes. He unhooked the cord that secluded the Vicarage pew; and the family, in exactly the same order, filed in. Keith was satisfied: his row of organ pipes, in their decent regularity, could be observed of the congregation throughout the service.

St. Austin's, Kensington, had "uses" of its own, warranted by no higher authority—but who cared for a higher authority?—than Dr. Ernest O'Grogan; and one of these "uses" was the trooping of a "processional hymn" round the church on every possible occasion. Let tradition say what it liked, was not the First Sunday in Advent a magnificent opportunity for the choir and clergy to burst out of the vestry doors with:

"Lo! he comes with clouds descending,
Once for favoured sinners slain;
Thousand thousand saints attending
Swell the triumph of His train"?

There would be no announcement of the hymn; the choir would just break it on the people, who would rise to it in their multitude. So, at the last clang of the bell and the first stroke of the clock—for Dr. Ernest O'Grogan had as boyish a delight

as George, the assistant verger, in a promptness like that of a gun to its trigger—the vestry doors flung wide, and the processional cross and the choir boys brought this great roll of song down the side aisle—“ Alleluia ! Alleluia ! Christ appears on earth again ”—behind the choir boys came twenty choirmen, some young and round-faced, some middle-aged and with long curling moustaches, some grey-whiskered and grey-bearded, and all boyishly pleased with the drama of their entry and with the richness of their voices ; then came the banner of St. Austin of Canterbury ; then came the junior curate ; then Mr. Flote in his gown, and carrying his silver wand (another “ use ” peculiar to St. Austin’s, and designed to give a proper dignity to the office of the vicariate) ; then—and the faces of the people fluttered towards him, so fine a figure was he—Dr. Ernest O’Grogan himself, wearing his scarlet hood. Dr. O’Grogan was a tall, broad man, whose immense vitality, after impressing itself on the greater part of cheaper Kensington, had plenty to spare for running to flesh. His neck had the round ruddy thickness and his mouth the straight thinness of a man who was developing aggressiveness and obstinacy, but in his other features he was most handsomely blessed : the nose, chin and brow had an imperial dignity ; the eyes were dark, bright, and with those persons who would yield to him, always playful ; and his hair, most blessed gift of all, crowned him with that exceptional distinction which silver hair can give to a man only forty years old. As a witty lady of his flock explained : “ Dr. Ernest was not a saint, but then how could he be with such features and such hair ? ” He was not singing, as the procession drew him like a fine conclusion round the church, but looking to left and right that he might drink satisfaction from the massed attendance, and smiling as he remembered that the same witty lady, in whom he delighted, had once called these thousand people “ The Ernest Worshippers.” The worshippers were rejoicing in the hymn, which had now entered upon its last verse and was rising, from *forte* to *fortissimo* :

“ Yes, Amen, let all adore Thee,
High on Thine eternal Throne ;
Saviour, take the power and glory ;
Claim the Kingdom for Thine own :

It expired before the clergy had reached the chancel steps, and the organist played the Vicar with a thunderous roll into his

stall, and, immediately the scarlet hood was there, stopped : as if the main business of all this triumphant inauguration were now achieved. The Vicar faced the congregation ; he waited till the silence was perfect ; he administered a dramatic snub to two later-comers by prolonging his wait till they had attained their pews and following them into that refuge with his eyes ; and then, in his good Irish voice, began :

“ I acknowledge my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me.”

After the service that long road smelt of roasting potatoes and steaming winter greens ; and the smell poured out on the noon air as strongly from the basement of the Vicarage as from any of the other houses. The children met it in their dining-room, where it had solidified into the form of Sunday dinner. The father sat at the head of the table with the joint ; the mother at the foot with the vegetables ; Keith and Joyce, as the larger children, on their father's right ; Derek, Peggy and Antony on his left. A parlour-maid, in a cap with long streamers, carried the plates around ; and Keith and Joyce finished their mutton and vegetables and red-currant jelly long before their father, who had to carve for many persons and, moreover, did a deal of talking about the thing uppermost in his mind—his recent sermon. At last their father had finished ; and their mother, who had given but a simulated interest to his talk, interrupted it with the suggestion that he rang the bell for the pudding ; and he rang it, and continued his talk. Up came the apple tart, and best of all, the cream ; and, not many minutes later, repletion was the fact most sensuously felt in the dining-room.

“ You're to go to the children's service, understand,” said Dr. O'Grogan, wiping his mouth with his napkin, and pushing back his chair. “ Your mother and I will be away. I am preaching the first of the Advent sermons at the Cathedral. I don't know but what Keith and Joyce might come too.”

A sudden alarm showed itself on Joyce's face, and a grimace turned down Keith's lips.

“ Would you like to, Keith ? ”

“ Well . . . ” Keith was beaten.

“ It'll be the same sermon as you preached this morning, won't it ? ” asked Joyce, with her ready wit.

“ Yes. Something the same, I suppose,” answered the

vicar, who knew it would be word for word the same, but sought a reputation, even among his children, as an extempore preacher.

"I rather wanted to hear the Crab's last sermon this afternoon."

"I wish you wouldn't speak of Mr. Crabb like that," her mother protested; but her father, paying no attention to his wife, broke in:

"All right, my dear, and so you shall. He is great with children, is Crabb." His tone left a clear impression: that, when it came to a question of preaching to a vast and intelligent adult congregation, there was no one on the staff in quite the same class as the vicar, and so the vicar could afford to praise generously the lesser gifts of his juniors. "Yes. Go, by all means, and hear his good-bye."

The father and mother retired upstairs, and the children to the breakfast-room, where Keith recovered his ascendancy.

"That's all nonsense about *us* going to Children's Service—you and me, Joyce, I mean. The Kids can go. We shan't. He didn't put us on our honour to; I carefully noticed that."

Joyce seemed frustrated again, and began hesitatingly:

"Still, I think we ought to. . . ."

"I don't. . . . It's absurd to make us go with all those smelly Sunday School children. . . . Here, Peggy and Tony, *you'll* jolly well go, and Derek'll look after you."

"Shan't," said Derek, occupied, after his fashion, on some solitary business.

"What if I make you?"

"Shan't go with Peggy and Tony."

"Oh, won't you?"

"No."

Keith stared at him threateningly, like a lion-tamer hypnotizing a rising beast; and the child was overawed.

"I may look in," he conceded. "On my own."

"You may," agreed Keith.

Now little Peggy intruded herself excitedly: "Keatings, *I'll* take Tony. I'd love to. I'll look after him, I promise I will. Do let me."

Keith studied her with a humorous scrutiny. "Strange child," he commented.

"Keatings, may—may I? Oh, may I?"

"Certainly, Certainly."

"Oh, good! Come on, Tony." She rushed to the child, took his hand and led him, unprotesting, towards the door. "Come; I'll get you ready."

Peggy, at six and a half, had a fringe of brown hair nearly reaching her eyebrows. The rest of her hair reached her shoulders where it turned round in a curl. Her mouth was large and moist, and her eyes large and moist. One feature of her attire seemed ever the same; though weekday frocks might give place to Sunday frocks, and playroom frocks to party frocks, the left leg of her white drawers was always hanging low down, and always visible. This insecure funnel of drawers was as inseparable a detail of anyone's portrait of Peggy as the lustrous remoteness in her eyes; and both details, maybe, were fathered by the same pensiveness. All people remarked her pensiveness and would say that if she had not the vivacity and beauty of her elder sister, Joyce, she had, at any rate, an exceedingly interesting face. They said that both these two younger children had exceedingly interesting faces—faces that made you wonder what they would do in life; and Dr. O'Grogan, when his pulpit brilliance was invading his dinner-table talk, would say so too. "All the three elder children have just ordinary good looks and, as far as I can read them, utterly objective minds; and therefore they'll probably be fairly successful in the world. But little Peggy and little Tony, anyone can see, are subjective creatures; their minds are inward. They can be impudent enough but their eyes, when the sparkle of impudence has left them, turn inward at once. Yes, the shadows will fall deeper and the lights shine brighter in the lives of my Peggy and Tony."

So, lest he were right, watch Peggy as she carried off Tony to an afternoon's worship. She quickly arrayed herself and turned and ordered his toilet; she buttoned his reefer coat and dusted his knickers; she straightened his hair and, wetting the corner of her handkerchief with her tongue, removed all traces of the apple-tart from his mouth; she put a prayer-book in one of his hands and took the other in her own and led him out of the vicarage to the church. The November afternoon was sharply cold and had turned misty, so that when they passed into the church, its sudden warmth struck like the warmth of an oven door. But some of the mistiness had entered the church before them, and the windows shone opaquely, and the unlit chancel, behind its screen, seemed very dark, and Peggy could

feel that she was leading her little brother into an atmosphere of God. Mr. Flote smiled at them as they walked up the nave, and the few adults, scattered here and there in the hinder pews, smiled too; for they were amused to see a small girl, with one of her drawers insecurely depending, dragging a smaller boy up the whole length of the nave and pushing him into one of the pews reserved for "The Children of the Congregation." She pushed him on to his knees, that he might perform a private devotion, and then sought her own hassock and knelt too. But Peggy alone knew that this was a mere concession to appearances and that she wasn't really praying. Peggy alone knew that, for a long time now, appalled at her secret sins, she had withdrawn from the insincerity of prayer.

From every door the Sunday School children were pouring in, their teachers pushing them and their Superintendents shepherding them into allotted pews. The church was full of the sound of shuffling feet and noisy whispering. Much interest in the dirty little Sunday School children was being shown by the "Children of the Congregation," where they sat very clean and well-behaved, their nurses and governesses among them. Before the last of the children were in their places, Mr. Crabb, middle-aged, fat, and jolly, came to the Chancel steps and beamed over all. There was rustling and craning and neck-stretching among his audience. He announced the first hymn, and smiled as if he were announcing a great game:

"I love to hear the story
Which Angel voices tell. . . ."

Out boomed the organ, and many hundred children slithered from their seats to their feet. They were singing now. Perhaps it might be said that the older boys were roaring, but Mr. Crabb only directed on them a beam of gratification and they, who had been under the impression that they were doing something bad, began to wonder if they were doing something good. The hymn had hardly started before Derek "looked in," as he had promised. He came through the West Door and seated himself alone in a back pew, after the manner of the solitary adults. Having a high sense of the proprieties he knelt for ten seconds, and then rose to assist in the current hymn. Almost immediately Joyce, having escaped (who knew how?) from Keith, rushed in, anxious not to miss a minute's vision of her beloved Mr. Crabb. She saw Derek and pushed

beside him, with the idea of spending the service, like a friendly sister, at his side. But he, annoyed at being thus converted from a single adult to one of two children, moved out of the pew, singing, "I am glad my blessed Saviour was once a child like me," and chose a lonelier seat behind. Joyce turned and smiled broadly at him for such pomposity, and then, rather out of breath, added her shrill and happy voice to the uproarious song :

"He never will forget me,
Because he loves me so."

When Mr. Crabb ascended the pulpit stairs and six hundred children with shuffle and slither sat themselves down in the pews, Peggy placed Tony in a sitting position and herself beside him, and took one of his hands in hers, as she had seen other governesses do. And she stared up at the preacher. Mr. Crabb was leaning over the pulpit to make his first point—leaning over so far that it seemed he was thinking more about the effectiveness of his opening words than about his safety. Fat and jovial, he looked—in this thrilling moment before speech—rather like a benevolent snail extending itself out of its shell.

"There's a lot in a door," he said.

Having said this, he drew himself in, and stood upright, and smiled.

"There's an awful lot in a door," he repeated. "The door of this church, for instance—" six hundred children turned round to have a look at the big West Door—"Yes, there it is, children; the door of this church opens on to very great things. It admits to the greatest things in the world. *Ahem!*—" he coughed humorously, and leaned out again: "I daresay you think it leads to greater things when you approach it from within, at the end of a children's service, say. Eh? Well, well, well. Time'll be when you'll know that it leads to greater things if you approach it from without, and you'll remember that I told you so, one misty Sunday in November. . . . Our subject this afternoon is Doors, and one door in particular. And we'll begin by saying this: *Open the doors more often than you shut them.* On the whole you're more likely to do right if you open a door than if you shut it. . . .

"Now should we say that three times?"

They said it three times, with immense willingness and immense indifference.

"And that reminds me that my old father often says——"

Surprise quieted the children to a sudden interest. They conceived of Mr. Crabb as old himself—corpulent and jolly, but old. And here was talk of Mr. Crabb's father. Peggy, listening with taut interest, pictured a palsied Methuselah, nut-crackery and mummified.

"My old father often says, when I have most inconsiderately left him sitting in a draught, that doors are made to be shut. Well, in such a circumstance as that they *are*; once or twice in life they *are*; but on the *whole*, children—speaking *generally*, children, you do a glorious thing nearly every time you open a door, and a harsh thing nearly every time you shut it. And that reminds me of the story of Rhoda——"

The congregation sat up. It always did when Mr. Crabb smiled his most expansive smile and said that something reminded him of the story of someone. One little girl, sitting among the children of the Moon Street Sunday School, sat up more abruptly than the others. Her name was Rhoda Bell, and she was suffering a horrid fear that the Reverend Crabb was going to talk about her.

"You all know who Rhoda was, don't you?" cajoled the preacher over the pulpit.

Quite fifty little girls turned round in their pews and looked at Rhoda Bell and giggled.

"Well, Rhoda was a serving maid in a very nice household. Quite the nicest household in Jerusalem—turn round, you little girls. It was Mrs. Mark's household, you know, about which you can read in the twelfth chapter of the *Acts*. Mrs. Mark was the mother of John Mark, who was our dear Lord's disciple. And she was an extraordinarily nice person, Mrs. Mark." (At this point a lady who disapproved of making children laugh in church got up and walked out; while the huge majority of the congregation turned round to study her exit.) "She was an extraordinarily nice woman, Mrs. Mark," continued the impenitent Mr. Crabb. "She used to keep open house for the apostles. And once, you know, when Peter was in prison and in serious danger of being put to death, she and her friends, and Rhoda, her serving maid, were all together—and what do you think they were doing? You boy, what do you think they were doing?"

The small boy, thus addressed, promptly stated the only business which, in his thinking, could assemble a lady and her friends together. "Eatin'," he suggested.

"No. Oh, no," Mr. Crabb reproached him. "Hardly eating. It was past the time for eating. Besides, I can't think such loving people had much appetite for eating so long as poor Peter was in prison. Not eating, I think."

"Washid' up," ventured another child, taking the next event in the natural order of life.

Mr. Crabb shook his head.

"Sewin'," tried a little girl.

Again Mr. Crabb shook his head, smiling his forgiveness.

"Readin' the Boible," called a large boy. Not that he was a pious child, but because he believed in giving the clergy the answers they wanted, and so avoiding unnecessary delay.

Mr. Crabb smiled patiently.

"Remember," he said, "Peter was in prison—in trouble. Surely there is only one thing to do when your friend is in trouble."

Then happened the thing that shamed Joyce so intolerably and made Peggy blush brilliantly and sink lower in her seat by Tony's side, who was now asleep: Derek called out, "*Pray for him*"—and called it out quickly, lest anyone else should get in with the true answer and away with the honour before he did. Who but Derek would have been such a brainless idiot, and so secure from shyness, as to do a thing like this, when everyone knew that only the Sunday School children were expected to answer the questions from the pulpit—not the ladies' children?

"Precisely!" acknowledged the preacher, radiant with approval. "They were all together praying for Peter. And—even as they prayed—the doors of Peter's prison far away, huge, studded doors, were swung open by an angel. So often—so often, my children, they are angels that open doors. . . . Should we say that three times? . . . Thank you. So the doors were swung open, and Peter found himself in the street. And, standing there, he saw in his mind's eye Mrs. Mark's household, and the warm welcome he would get from Mrs. Mark and from young John Mark, and from charming Rhoda, the bright-eyed serving maid. So he turned naturally towards their door. There was something beautiful about Mrs. Mark's door. (I told you this sermon was going to be all about doors.) You see: all doors are beautiful to which people turn first in trouble or in joy. . . . Yes, I think we'll say that three

times. . . . Thank you so much ; you said it very nicely. . . . Well, Peter came to that door and knocked. . . .”

Mr. Crabb knocked three slow and awful knocks on the pulpit. The silence in the church was sepulchral.

“Knock . . . knock . . . knock,” declaimed Mr. Crabb, only half reminiscent of Macbeth.

He leaned over the pulpit and whispered with great dramatic power : “Rhoda heard that knock. . . . She rose. It was her duty to go to the door. . . . She was a little startled, I think, or she would have opened it at once. It can be a startling thing, a knock at the door—and the sound of a man’s footsteps on the threshold. ‘Who’s there?’ she asked. Wonderful words ! *Who’s there?*”

The words were so wonderful that they stilled the whole congregation to silence. The children were staring with wide eyes at the preacher. Peggy’s jaw was drooping, and her hand, holding the sleeping Tony’s, pressed it excitedly.

“Who was there——”

“Peter,” answered Derek, anxious to pursue his recent success, and lacking the imagination to distinguish between a rhetorical question and a friendly test of memory.

“Yes, yes.” Mr. Crabb rebutted the unwanted answer and continued the rhetoric. “‘Who’s there?’ she asked. ‘It’s me,’ said a voice. Was it—could it possibly be Peter’s voice? Yes. It sounded like it. She thought it was. But how could it be? Peter was in prison, and they had just been praying for him. If anything was outside the door, it must be Peter’s ghost. Oh, what was she to do? What would she see if she opened the door? O Rhoda, what are you going to do? Won’t you have faith, and overcome your fears, and open that door. What happiness may come in, if you open it! What are you waiting in that passage for? . . .”

Like insubstantial things the grey walls of the church had faded out, taking with them the lofty windows, opaque with the November dusk ; and the walls of Rhoda’s passage had closed in and bounded each of six hundred waiting minds. Each child was standing in Rhoda’s passage, looking at her hall door. Each child was Rhoda, standing alone. There were six hundred passages, all different, and yet all the same. Peggy stood in a hall that was indistinguishable from the hall of the Vicarage : the lower half of its walls had a dado painted brown, and the upper half a paper that imitated Dutch tiles, and the

cornice a strip of applied leaf ornament ; on the left of the front-door was the hat-stand, with her father's black Inverness cape and soup-plate hat hanging on a peg ; opposite was a framed text, " GOD IS THE MASTER OF THIS HOUSE " ; and the front door at which she was staring had leaded windows which the street light was illuminating except where a shadow moved—a patient shadow—the shadow of a man. The door was bolted, and the chain was up, and she stood there alone. But somehow Mr. Crabb had passed very quietly through that bolted wood and was somewhere near, talking. Himself was invisible—a voice in the passage where she stood alone, staring at the closed door, and the shadow beyond it. He was saying that, just as Peter, when the angel opened his prison, came to Rhoda's door, so Jesus, now that an angel had rolled away the stone from his tomb, came to your door. He was saying that it was natural to have doubts and fears of the miracle ; but if only you would open the door straightaway, instead of doubting and worrying and arguing as little Rhoda did, you would just know—just *know* that He was no ghost but your best friend ; he was suggesting that they all went on their knees and said just what they liked to Jesus, and then they would all stand up and sing a very joyous hymn, because they would be very happy about what they had said to Him.

There was a far-spread rumbling noise, as of six hundred children exchanging their seats for the hassocks. Six hundred church interiors had come back and become one church interior ; and Peggy slipped to her knees in it—her father's grey church, filled with children, and strangely dark now, its windows all put out by a November twilight. The day that had been bright with pale sunlight was burning down into darkness and mystery ; and little plump Mr. Crabb had vanished in his pulpit—no, the crown of his head was still visible, for he had simply sunk down in it, and buried his face in his hands.

And in that minute of silence while the children knelt in the falling darkness, and Mr. Flote put a match to the long taper with which he would light the gas brackets all up the aisles, the O'Grogan children held their own thoughts : Keith, enjoying the privileges of his seniority, was reading *Peter Simple* at home ; Joyce, in one pew, was thinking how much she loved Mr. Crabb and wondering if she were as attractive as Rhoda ; Derek, in another pew, was enjoying his solitariness

and thinking that the service had not been so bad and that he had acquitted himself rather well; and Peggy, her face buried in her hands like Mr. Crabb's, was welcoming Jesus back again; and Tony was asleep with dreams that have been lost.

CHAPTER II

THE INWARD PEGGY AND THE INWARD ANTONY

SUNDAY, in the memories of the O'Grogan children when they grew up, and just such a wintry Sunday as this, stood out as a vessel that held much of the essence of their childhood. Other days, having no such isolation, merged into one another and made hazy patches ; for example, did Tuesday, as a word, mean anything at all ? Not even Saturday, the holiday, had a character so essential, because on Saturday, as on other weekdays, the family fell apart ; it was only Sunday that forced all the family to jostle together within its strict enclosure. On weekdays Keatings, as all called him now, went to his day-school at Colet Court, where he was in the Lower First and preparing for his entry into St. Paul's School ; Derek went likewise to Colet Court but went there alone, Keatings having refused to convoy a " kiddy brother," and Derek being completely satisfied with his own company ; Joyce went to Cottenham, a High School for girls ; and Peggy and little Tony sat in the breakfast room with a daily governess. Common, uncharactered days, they died in memory.

Joyce, like her brothers, walked alone to school, having loudly protested against being taken there by a mother or a maid. She had protested with blandishments, with kisses, with tears and with sulks ; and beneath such artillery her parents had capitulated. " Oh, let her have her way," Dr. O'Grogan had said, sealing it with a hug, " and Lord ! how I pity her husband ! " When bicycles became familiar spectacles in the streets, and the " New Women " impudently bestrode them in bloomers, and even the decorous ladies of St. Austin's Road had quiet lessons up and down its long stretch, reclining at alarming angles against their gentlemen teachers and often embracing them round their necks ; and when Maisie Thomson, a Cottenham

girl, pedalled her "Child's Model" past the Vicarage windows and, removing her hand from the controls to wave it to Joyce, crashed on to the crown of the road, Joyce opened a second campaign to be allowed to go to school on a bicycle. But this campaign dragged on for years before it issued in success.

If Sundays isolated themselves as single days, rather dark in colour, the Summer Holidays, the other quintessential patches of memory, isolated themselves as long stretches of time; and they sparkled beneath the sun, and were green with country foliage and blue with the sea.

It was the First of August, or the Second, or the Third—one or other in that string of lovely dates. The trunks were in the Vicarage hall; the labels were on the trunks—wonderful labels, "O'Grogan, Passenger to Freshwater, Isle of Wight, via Lymington;" the travelling rugs, strapped round, were lying floppily on the trunks; a luncheon hamper was in the charge of Derek (by his request); the noses of little Peggy and Tony were flat against the dining-room window, searching the length of St. Austin's Road for the first appearance of the bus—a private, one-horse, black affair, like the buses still attached to old hotels; Joyce, who was in the midst of a "pash" for her father, was following him wherever he went, lest she should lose her chance of sitting next to him throughout the journey; the bus was descried by Peggy and its horse-hoofs heard—and the hoofs of a cow-hocked horse clattering up a metalled road have sounded an overtone of beauty from that day to this.

They piled up the luggage on the bus-roof; Keatings, the senior, bagged the box-seat next the driver, before Derek could get there; Derek requested that he might be allowed to sit on the luggage-pile on the roof, but his father forbade him, saying "Certainly not! I am not going to take an Albert Memorial through the streets of my parish;" the children clambered inside; Mrs. O'Grogan said worryingly, "For mercy's sake try and be quieter. We shall have the neighbours complaining;" and the neighbours did indeed come to their windows; but returned to their work, announcing, "Oh, it's nothing. It's only the Vicarage children going away."

The vehicle lumbered off, and Peggy turned green and was put near the window, and Joyce, Derek and little Tony had an immense, staring interest in the sickly changes of her

complexion. "*I don't feel sick,*" Derek bragged, and his father suppressed him with a "*No, it's only children with imaginations who turn sick.*" Here was Waterloo Station; the luggage was unloaded from the bus-roof, great efficiency being displayed by Keatings; the porter wheeled it off, all the children crowding after him, to see it labelled; the bus clattered away; and nothing was left on the pavement, except the breakfast of Peggy, who was now feeling perfectly well and happy. Tony, running by his mother's side, kept looking back at that breakfast, till it was out of sight. He was wondering what people would do about it; and wonders to this day.

Four hours in the train, staring out at the country, or reading the comic papers. Extraordinary how delightful could be the first approach to these comic pictures, and how depressing the second! The journey palled, and Father drank something from a flask. The younger children fell asleep—to be awakened by "*Look! Look! It's Southampton Water.*" And they crowded to the window and saw the first ships and the first gulls, and smelt the seaweed and the sea.

They stayed at the window now, for the train was smoking through the New Forest, and they hoped to see the tree from which the arrow glanced that slew the Red King; or a wild pony; or some of the deer that the King loved as if he had been their father. Then came Lymington Town, and that marvellous slow run of the train on to Lymington Pier.

"There's the boat! There's the boat!"

"Where? Where?"

"There, you idiot!"

They were beside it; they were on the platform, standing by its gangway. And there, over the Solent, was the long heave of the Isle of Wight, with the new Tennyson's Monument standing like a tiny stick on one of its summits. We must climb up and see it to-morrow.

On to the ship, and watch *our* luggage being carried aboard. The engines have started; the paddle-wheels are moving; the boat forges out into a smell of sea-weed and a strong wind; down a winding channel between the green-haired flats and the squatting sea-gulls; past the white yachts riding at anchor, and the tubs on poles growing out of the water; out into the open sea, where the wind is stronger still and the buoys, in the running waves, float slantwise. Spray hits our cheeks and the smuts dirty us as they fly from the funnel. Look at the

Needles, marching in Indian file out to sea! The Isle of Wight draws nearer, and the long white Yarmouth pier enlarges from a toy pier to a towering pile, with people on it, waving. Now watch the boat coming alongside without hitting anything, and the sailors running the gangway aboard. Keep close now, everybody. Joyce, keep an eye on Peggy and Tony. What a crush! "People are not seen at their best at such times as these," Keatings is heard to remark, as he is pushed and sandwiched to the gangway. We are ashore; we may run down the pier to see if the Freshwater coach is at its foot, and if it has the same two horses as last year, Prince and Nippy; we race, except Keatings, who is too old for that sort of thing; Derek is at the pier-gates first—he would be!—and shouts that the coach is there—the pig! we wanted to discover it without being told about it first. We scramble on to the front seats; and the coachman, who knows us well, says, "Back once more?"

All the family's aboard, and all the strangers too, and the horses start for Freshwater. Joyce trumpets shrilly: "Tara-tara-tara!" Past the Lonely Tree and over the Toll Bridge that spans the Yar and down the lovely familiar lanes, past old villagers quickly recognized and hailed—see, the friendly coachman is allowing Derek to hold the reins and Tony to hold the whip! There is secret alarm in the soul of Peggy, lest Derek should overturn the coach; but there is little danger, for Derek (to be truthful), is holding them very gently.

Here are the outskirts of Freshwater. Here are some of the shops we know so well; and we begin to see everywhere the holiday-making children, hatless, sunburned, bare-legged,—the very spirits of Freshwater Holidays. This is School Green; in a few minutes we shall have reached our cottage—our other home. The coach spans round Victoria House, where the draper's is—and at once all fingers are pointing to the thatch on our cottage roof. The coachman gathers his reins and draws them in. We are there.

Yes, but Derek says he is going on with the coach as far as the Bay.

Oh, may we *all* go on with the coach as far as the Bay—may we? We want to see the Arch and the Stag Rocks, and the tamarisk, and the broken esplanade. May we?

Yes, we and Father will travel on to the Bay, and return

afoot. So on we roll, past Tennyson's Lane and Gubbins', the stationers ; past the Apartment houses—there's where the Baldwins stayed last year, and there's where Dick Galway used to hang out his bathing togs—and so into the Bay of chalk cliffs, with the breakers foaming at their base ; of purple beach littered with the chunks and fragments of the esplanade ; of bare-limbed, pink-brown children who run shrieking to meet the coach, waving prawn-nets and towels and spades. The sun glistens on the sea, and there are people bathing. Oh, couldn't we bathe *this afternoon* ?

During this holiday Peggy passed through a spiritual crisis to a conversion. Not the first conversion in her life, nor the last, but one of the most striking. A miracle played its part in it ; or she thought it a miracle at the time ; and if in later years she was to invoke coincidence to explain it, the hour was past then for altering the bias it had given to her childhood.

It happened that Joyce had gone away to spend a fortnight with a school friend, and Peggy, not liking to sleep alone, was sharing the bedroom protected by Derek. This was a little slope-roofed chamber, whose chimney stack abutted like a bluff headland on to the floor-space, and whose low window peeped under the thatch at a meadow dotted with cows. There were two narrow bedsteads on either side of the chimney stack, and a *Tit Bits* presentation plate on one wall, and an engraving of the Good Shepherd on the other. Here she was converted.

Her Christianity, for many months before this event, had been a Christianity of the mind entirely, her will having receded from it. Her mind accepted without question all that her father and mother told her about Heaven, and all that the maids told her about Hell, and all that Derek, who spoke with much confidence and authority, told her about Satan. Her mind endorsed the omnipotence of God, even to maintaining angrily that *of course* he could make a door open and shut at the same time. But this faith was producing no good works now. The period of good works which she had enjoyed after Mr. Crabb's sermon about Rhoda had not lasted long ; which failure her secret heart had awaited from the beginning.

Her faith, truth to tell, was precisely the faith of the devils :

she believed and trembled. And this meant, as always, that if she had no moral works, she had plenty of superstitious ones. In the bedtime concerts, for example, she insisted on a careful divorce between the sacred items and the secular.

These concerts were held in the long summer evenings after they had been dismissed to bed; it was impossible to go to sleep while daylight was on the other side of the blinds and the voices of their father and mother, and of Keatings, came up from the room below, so they passed an hour with music. The items would be either instrumental or vocal, provided always that Derek conducted them. If they were instrumental, they were produced by the issue of a buzzing hum through Peggy's teeth and of the word "twang-twang" through Derek's nose. But whether they were instrumental or vocal, a sharp distinction, so Peggy insisted, had to be maintained between the rendering of comic songs and the rendering of hymns; they should always count twenty before passing from "I bet my money on a bob-tailed nag, Doodah, doodah, day" to "I love to hear the story which Angel voices tell;" and if the comic song were excessively comic, they must increase the twenty to fifty. Sometimes they continued their singing till after Keatings was in bed, and then he, either of his abounding high spirits or as a protest against being kept awake, would suddenly bellow his part of the chorus from his room; which would bring their mother to the foot of the stairs with that sentence inseparable from her: "Quiet, *quiet!* children. *We shall have the neighbours in!*"

And again: Peggy insisted that if she and Derek told tales about fairies, or about people who didn't really exist, it was necessary to preserve them from being lies by prefixing the title "Pretend" to these fictitious characters when first you mentioned them. That done, one could invent the wildest tales about them; she had told Derek some incredible stuff about her "Pretend Uncle" who was staying at the Freshwater Bay Hotel.

But Peggy was inclined to wish she had never given birth to her pretend uncle, when Derek produced his formidable pretend cousins who lived in the Western Caves.

The western arm of Freshwater Bay is the Redoubt Cliff, which has caves like a cathedral underneath it, and in the furthest of these caves is the Frenchman's Hole, a natural but terrible little corridor leading up into the dark interior of the

living rock. Derek had taken Peggy and shown her the place, affirming that it was here that his cousins retired at night. To reach it was not easy. When the tide was out you footed it along the rocks, walking delicately, because they were both sharp with jagged ends and slippery with sea-weed. It was best to have your legs bared for immersion, which might be intentional or unintentional; but to keep your rubber sand-shoes on, so as to save your feet from the knives of rock or the upturned mussel-shells, from the pinch of a crab or the tickling of the prawns. You entered first the Great Cave (St. Austin's Church), with its apsidal end and its Gothic roof, so high where the great entry spanned the sea and so low where its drooping vault met the shelving beach. Keatings had once confirmed Joyce, Derek, Peggy and Tony here, and had more than once tried to church Joyce. After the Great Cave you passed into a smaller cave, The Vestry, and then bent your head to the Emergency Exit, a sea-worn tunnel, little wider than a crack; you went through it hurriedly lest this were the moment (which must one day come) when its walls fell in and either crushed you to powder or enclosed you alive for ever. From it you emerged into the light of the third cave—and your breath quieted. The thing to look at here was the dark and sinister opening of the Frenchman's Hole. It fascinated you. Derek had one morning decided to climb into it and report its nature; but he had only, while Peggy watched, taken two steps into the hole's dark heart, and then come down again. The time was getting late, he explained, and they mustn't risk being cut off by the tide.

Derek's cousins lived only by night in the Frenchman's Hole. During the daylight they left it for their operations all over the island. Wherever the O'Grogan children went, Derek always justified the fact that he accompanied them by explaining to Peggy that he was really going to meet his cousins, who were invisible to all but him. Sometimes the family passed through the gate of the Military Road to go and picnic on Afton Down, which was all a-dance with cat's ear and scabious and thistle and harebells; and Derek generally walked on one side alone, keeping, it was to be presumed, his ghostly company. Sometimes they descended the southern flank of the down, where all the grey grass blew one way and shimmered delightedly under the tickling breeze, that they might have tea at Compton Farm; and Derek always got to the bottom first, partly because

he liked to beat other people and partly because his relatives were awaiting him in the farm. On calm and dazzling days they got into single canoes and paddled them at high water into the Eastern caves ; and Derek drove a lonely vessel to his assignation in the green, submarine light. Quite often he disappeared for a whole morning, leaving the others to play among the tumbled chunks of the old sea-wall, which the ruthless tides had shattered ; or to bathe under the supervision of Andrews, the blonde and genial fisherman ; or to go out in a boat and hook up the rock-whiting, under the charge of Munster, the dark and surly fisherman, reputed to be the poisoner of his wife. And great adventures he enjoyed with his cousins in those solitary hours, and rehearsed to Peggy at bedtime. So far as she could make out there were three of them : two boys and a girl. But their numbers varied strangely, and their ages and heights too. It was this atmosphere of the unknown and of variable-ness, together with certain occult powers they possessed, that made them grow rather uncanny to Peggy, rather terrifying. She at once longed and dreaded to hear stories of them.

The weather was hot that August. Weeks had passed without rain ; the grass was burned yellow ; the country roads seemed to bake one's bare legs, and the water in the rocks to dazzle one's eyes. The nights were too sultry for sleep ; and Peggy would toss restively, hating to be still awake after Derek began to breathe long and rhythmically. Sometimes Derek had a way of not being asleep when he appeared to be, so that, if he suddenly spoke to her, after she had rolled round in her bed, it gave her a nasty turn.

"Are you awake, Peggy ?" he asked one night.

"Yes," she answered, as her heart accelerated and decelerated.

"I say," continued Derek, rather mysteriously ; and Peggy, alarmed into looking at him, could see his eyes staring into hers. "Would you like to meet my cousins—to *see* them, I mean, as *I* can ?"

"Yes," Peggy answered, feeling socially obliged to do so.

"Well, I was talking to them this afternoon. And they told me how it could be done. They know you well, of course. They've often been watching you, when you didn't know they were there. They were invisible, of course. Perhaps they're in the room now, watching us, being able to see in the dark."

Peggy set her teeth.

"They told me there's only one way of your being able to

see them. And that is to visit the cave at midnight. I'd do it. I'm not afraid, are you?"

She guessed at once from what dark pool Derek, the unoriginal, had lifted this horrid idea. Of late he had been reading "Eric, or Little by Little," where the boys broke from school in the middle of the night and went through the darkness to strange places. And the book had captured him so completely that many of his solitary journeys had been in search of secluded coppices where he could read it undisturbed; and the last sad chapter, as Peggy well knew, had sent him like a sick animal out of the sight of men, to cry in a green corner; from which he had returned to her, red-eyed, but with brave tales of a meeting with his cousins.

"I shouldn't be afraid of staying in the cave—with you," she said.

This expressed accurately a fine shade of the truth. Peggy was not afraid of the cave, or of the tide, or of the moonlit darkness, or of any tangible things; she shrank only from some awful materialization of Derek's cousins. Out of the black Frenchman's Hole they would come. And she knew that when these fears got hold of her, the correcting principle in her brain, which ought to keep reminding her that it was only a game, would fail to work. That was the terror: Derek's worked; hers did not. To her it was real.

"Well, when shall we do it, Peggy?"

"I don't know."

"Guess."

She failed to guess, having an idea that if she named a day, she would increase the chances of its all happening.

"Why, there's only one day possible," said Derek. "Thursday, when Father and Mother are going to London for the night, and it just happens it's low tide at eleven-forty—so Andrews says. The Fates are with us. I think my cousins must have arranged for the tide to be out that night."

"Derek . . ."

"Yes?"

"Derek, we could only go if it's fine," Peggy pointed out, in a burst of hope that it would be wet.

"Oh, it'll be fine all right. My cousins'll arrange for that. Good-night."

"Good-night."

There was moisture on Peggy's brow as she lay in bed. This

was an awful game of Derek's, and she would have to go into it quite alone ; Derek would not really accompany her, because he would be able to remember that it was all a game, but to her it would be real. If only the weather would break, and the rains set in. She lifted her lids that she might see through the open window what the night promised, but her eyes met a sky blue-black and sheening like velvet, and brilliant with stars.

By the evening of the next day, Peggy, who had begun by being afraid of something in the cave, was so obsessed by her fear that she had almost forgotten what it was about. But nothing existed save in its relation to that dark, incomprehensible fear. The hours that marked off time were only important in so far as they meant that she was getting nearer and nearer to the awful moment. London, for which Dr. O'Grogan would leave to-morrow to fulfil a preaching engagement too flattering to be missed, she thought of only as a city which might conveniently be burned down between now and to-morrow, or be visited by another Great Plague, which would slay its tens of thousands and postpone Dr. O'Grogan's visit. In which circumstances, Derek, she knew, would spend Thursday night in his bed. And all these thoughts showed her how frightfully selfish she was, and how worse than useless it would be to do the thing she was now longing to do ; which was to call in God to her assistance, to apologize for eight months of deliberate rebellion, and to strike a bargain with Him for the future. He was omnipotent, and could invent something remarkable to stop Derek going. Perhaps He would undo the past, and make it as if this idea had never been born in their minds. But Peggy's spiritual eyes were too bright for her to do this : God, she saw, would know that it was only in fear that she was approaching Him, and that she would not abide by her bargain longer than a month, at most ; He might even treat her negotiations as insolence and punish her by sending the exact opposite of what she asked ; and if, anticipating this, she purposely asked the opposite of what she wanted, He was too clever not to see through it.

Wednesday came, and Dr. and Mrs. O'Grogan left for London ; and Thursday succeeded Wednesday, swift as a weaver's shuttle. It was like the last day on earth of a condemned criminal. All day, as she kept up an appearance of playing on the beach, she was really envying Keatings and

Derek and little Tony, who had no reason to dread the coming of the night. She wondered what they would think if they knew of her sufferings.

With the fall of evening and the gathering of the darkness, her terror became intolerable. No matter if it were futile; no matter if it would bring on her the punishment of the frivolous and the profane, she *would*—she *must* ask God to do something to stay the carrying out of Derek's plan. "O God, make it rain—make it rain!" she prayed at her bedside; and lest God were not prepared to send rain and spoil other people's enjoyment just for her sake, she explained that she was quite ready to be taken ill in the night. She knelt long on the floor to make her knees hurt and thus add a value to her prayers.

Rising from crushed knees she felt better. But it was only the despairing calm that comes from having taken a final step. She had not much hope; especially when Derek, showing no new control by God, said cheerfully: "You'd better try to get some sleep now. I'll call you about eleven. I shall be awake. And the night's absolutely perfect—hot as hot." Ten thousand to one that God would do nothing, unless he punished her. The night was indeed as fine and hot as ever. Phew! It was overpowering! She sighed a deep sigh, and lay down with the bedclothes no higher than her waist.

She woke with a horrible start, to hear a voice summoning her in the darkness.

"Peggy! Peggy!"

Her heart leapt, and at the same time a frightful noise like an explosion rent the air outside, and ran echoing away. A brilliant light lit up all the room; she saw the washstand, and the coloured "photograph" of the fishmonger's boy reading *Tit Bits*, and the uncoloured "photograph" of the Good Shepherd. The curtains blew with a shudder into the room. Dogs barked over the countryside, some near and some far away; voices spoke the other side of the room wall; and a very late, or very early, market cart clattered down the distance as if it were escaping from a terror.

"Peggy, are you awake?" It was Derek's voice. "Look at the lightning! Isn't it splendid?"

He jumped to the floor and ran to the open window, which was at the foot of her bed. She too sat up, with a heart like a caught bird, and looked out. A flash shaped for her, with the

clearness of a woodcut, the white road, the black elms and the hedgerow beyond, and the meadow with its standing cows.

"My!" exclaimed Derek. "The cows are all huddled together. And they and the old horse are all looking the same way. Do you know why that is?" And, in case she knew and got her answer in first, he hastened to tell. "They're turning their backs to the way the weather's coming from."

Crash came another thunderclap. And lightning again. Peggy did not mind. She loved it. She had no fear of concrete thunderstorms but only of fantastic chimeras. Crash again. Then a curious sound of rushing, of something tearing through the elms, and beating on the road; a sound of many waters in the gulleys. It was the rain. Sheets of it.

"My!" Derek greeted it. "It's raining cats and dogs."

There was another crash of thunder; and the noise of its reverberation was sharply diminished as Derek slammed the window.

"Pho-o-o-o-o!" he whistled.

The rain-spines stormed against the glass; and the lightning lit them up into long knitting needles.

"I expected it," said Derek, sitting up in bed and staring at the frame of the window. "I knew all the evening that the weather was going to break and spoil all our plans. It *would*. I knew all along my forehead that thunder was coming."

But it was useless to talk to Peggy about the inevitability of the weather-break. She knew that the secret of that noisy downpour was in the possession of two people only—herself as she lay in bed and Him who wielded the storm. She lay exhilarated. It was, in germ, the experience that older people call conversion. There was a sudden new revelation of God's intense personal interest in her; a sudden conception of a love for her so great that it was always ready to treat past offences and wicked blasphemies as though they had never been. She lay vowing within herself: "Oh, I will try. I will try." And suddenly she remembered with widening eyes, and with fear at the thought that, perhaps, she was a chosen vessel, the story of St. Paul and the dazzling light from Heaven.

You are suspecting that Peggy is to be the chief person in this tale.

Nothing of the sort.

Until that train journey to Freshwater, Tony, the youngest of these children, had been an electric tram; that is to say, he had run at an even pace along the walks of Kensington Gardens, drawing electricity for his motive power through a toy walking-stick which he extended so that it sizzled along the low railings at the grass's edge. While his right hand held firmly this transducer, his left turned imaginary brakes and controlling handles.

The result of such expert driving was a steady, smooth run from stopping-place to stopping-place, accompanied by a droning *siss* from his teeth that did little more than emphasize the exquisite silence of his engines. The halts were about a hundred yards apart, and sometimes the brakes had to be jammed down very sharply, so that he could pull up in record time on the crunched and dissipated gravel. He would wait for thirty seconds while the passengers got aboard, and then, after a *ting-ting*, a slight jerk that no doubt shook the passengers, and a suggestion of grinding, the vehicle moved again.

But now the attributes of an electric tram were fading out, and he was developing the parts of a steam engine. On his return from Freshwater to Kensington, he found that the narrow and precisely straight pavement, stretching from Kensington Road, past his front door, to Uxbridge Road, was really the permanent way from Waterloo to Lymington. The gas lamps were stations which, when he was an express, he ignored with a shriek and a whistle. Sometimes he swung round the curve into Uxbridge Road (with a menacing list more in the character of a heavy-sailed frigate than a locomotive) and whistled very loudly here, rather than drive to the public danger.

Tony, in these days, was a round-faced, round-bodied boy, all of whose features were quite indeterminate, except his eyes and his hands. His eyes were remarkable, so his father would maintain, because at one moment they could be as unseeing and remote as Peggy's, and at the next as impudent as Joyce's. And to his hands, with their long fingers, his father would often point as earnestly that height must one day come to that tub of a body, and artistry claim its life. Tony was the only one of the children who had not yet weaned himself from a fawning, clamorous dependence on his mother. All the others

had vaguely apprehended that, for some reason which they might one day know, there was a strange ossification of emotion in their tall, thin, tired mother which left her little to express sincerely except a resigned querulousness. But Tony could still hang about her, clamouring that he didn't want her to go out. Once he had begged her, if she must leave the house, to slip away while he wasn't looking; and when she asked how that could be any good, he replied: "Well, it's all right, once you've really gone."

Life was heightened for Tony when his godmother promised that she would give him an engine for his birthday. This godmother was Aunt Adelaide, his father's sister, and the wife of the great Archdeacon Gabriel. She was a big, plump, well-dressed woman, tight-laced in body and still more tight-laced in mind; and she appeared always with a deal of gold chain resting on the slope of her bosom and depending down the bluff. Even at this age Tony had perceived that her figure, in spite of the whalebone corsets which he had so often experienced, was more cubiform than it ought to have been. And he could remember sitting in his more babyish days on her knees, holding on to her chain and likening it to a cable hung over a cliff by the coastguards at Freshwater to draw a lee-shore mariner to safety.

"It's Tony's birthday next week, isn't it?" Aunt Adelaide asked him one day, with her silly habit of speaking to him as if he were a third person. "What would he like for a present?"

Now it was an accepted convention among the adults that between Tony and Aunt Adelaide, since she was his godmother, a link of peculiar affection existed; and Tony, so far, had been quite prepared to believe all that they told him about his love. But he had a poor opinion, none the less, of her discernment in the matter of presents. Last year she had given him a cannon that was fired by nothing more exciting than a very feminine spring.

"Please, I want an engine," replied Tony, with such readiness that for a second he feared she might guess that his answer had long been prepared. But then he remembered that Aunt Adelaide had scarcely understanding enough to detect the subtler shades of expression.

"An engine?" echoed Aunt Adelaide patronizingly. "What sort of engine?"

"An engine like the one we went to Freshwater in. . . . Only a toy one," he added, to help her out.

"Hasn't he got an engine?" asked the stupid woman of his mother.

"No," said his mother. "I don't think he has."

"No, I haven't," Tony hastily corroborated.

"Then that's settled. An engine it shall be." And she drew Tony against the whalebone and kissed him. "And now you must forget all about it. . . . He doesn't know what I'm going to give him," she explained to his mother, pushing him away and rearranging her chain. "Don't tell him what it is. It's a secret. Sh!" She put her finger to her lips. "Sh! Sh! Not a word!"

This impressed Tony as rather a good joke; he was aware of a certain surprise that Aunt Adelaide should come out so strong.

During the long, slow-rolling days before his birthday—days that had their interest, though, because glamorous with anticipation—the furniture of Tony's world, such as chairs and tables and beds, seemed to pale a little and become subservient to one sharply defined article that, though small, had more individuality than anything else; which was strange, because the chairs and tables really existed, whereas the sharply-defined article could scarcely be said to exist as yet. It was the engine; Aunt Adelaide's birthday gift. Tony saw it always; a wonderful model of the Waterloo locomotive. The steam would be produced by an oil-lamp, of course, not coal—he wasn't going to be such a fool as to expect more than a small oil lamp. And it would *siff* in the little boiler and *chuff chuff* through the pistons; and when you turned a tiny handle at the whistle, it would give a faint, sibilant sound—not like the shriek of a real engine, doubtless, but good in its degree. And the boiler—Tony had determined to err on the side of expecting too little—would probably be about as big as the smallest of the sugar castors. But it would be long: all true boilers were long.

Every afternoon before his birthday Tony suggested to his governess that he and Peggy took their afternoon air along Kensington Road and Kensington High Street. The children conceived of Kensington Road as the chief street of London. Its terraces of flat-fronted houses stared between their tar-nished trees at an endless head-race of green omnibuses, red

omnibuses, hansoms, four-wheelers, victorias, broughams, tandems, drays—among whose horses shot the red-coated scavengers, always busy. It had Olympia at one end, to which came Barnum and Bailey's Freaks, and Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show; it had the Roman Catholic Pro-Cathedral in the middle, where Father Bernard Vaughan denounced contemporary society; and then the great shops and the huddled corner of St. Mary Abbott's, where the Black Maria could often be seen, with the policeman standing on its step.

And sometimes the little old bonneted Queen drove down this way in her open carriage, with four horses and postilions in front, and truly royal C-springs beneath, and two Indians or two Highlanders perched on the flunkeys' seat behind. Ahead of the carriage and astern of it rode a Sovereign's Escort of the Life Guards, their helmets, swords, and breastplates glittering. "The Queen, children! The Queen!"

Tony gave no reason why he vociferated so loudly for Kensington Road, but it was because of a famous toy-shop which chanced to have the exact engines in its window: beautiful little models, running on eight wheels and bogeys; with pistons and cranks and shining brass piping each side of the long boilers, and whistles whose handles invited turning, and the true stumpy funnels. Every afternoon he stared at them and wondered which of these it would be like. He chose the smallest. Even if it were no larger than that, it would be very satisfying.

The vigil night of his birthday he slept little. But then he did not want to sleep; it was so pleasant to think that every tick of the clock was bringing him nearer to the engine. He felt sorry for Keatings and Joyce and Derek and Peggy who were lying in bed without the prospect of a birthday in the morning. On the same score he felt sorry for his parents, his governess and the servants. And when he suddenly opened his eyes and saw sunlight pouring through the holland blinds, he could not understand. Had he been asleep then? He was sure he had not. Yes, he had, though; and now it must be to-morrow morning, already.

In honour of his birthday Tony's egg at breakfast was distinguished from those of Keatings, Joyce, Derek and Peggy, by its cochineal tint. And all his presents, except the engine, which Aunt Adelaide was to bring with her own hands, were spread about his plate, packed up in brown paper. There

were soldiers and chocolates and a fireman's complete uniform. The soldiers were the best, for they could be put into the tender of the engine and steamed away to war. Yes, these things were very nice, but mere curtain-raisers before the great event of the day.

With a fidgeting impatience, and much pressing of his nose against the dining-room window, Tony watched for Aunt Adelaide. And when he saw her coming his legs kicked in an excited autonomy, and his breath came short and quick. The ringing of the door-bell caused his fist to rush to his open mouth and remain there, as if he were petrified by his own anticipation. He listened to Aunt Adelaide being shown into the breakfast-room. Why the breakfast-room? He listened to steps approaching his door. He watched the door open and heard the maid telling him to go and see his Auntie in the breakfast-room.

Along the passage he went, slowing with nervousness as he drew near the room. He was almost loath to give up the poignant joy of anticipation. Turning the handle, he opened the door six inches. But Aunt Adelaide gave a humorous shriek and called out: "No, no. Not yet. Not just yet. Stay outside a moment longer. Mother and I are getting it ready. Only one minute, dear."

Instantly he shut the door, eager to join in the game. Fancy Aunt Adelaide having the imagination to start it going on the dining-room table! He had seen, just as he shut the door, that the cloth was off and the table bare. Aunt Adelaide was entering into it with as much excitement as himself. It was absolutely—he used a word he had just learned from Keatings—it was absolutely top-hole of Aunt Adelaide. He would give her, though he did not care for the experience much, the huge hug and kiss she would expect. In his excitement out there on the landing, his legs began to fidget of their own accord, and he caught himself *chuff-chuffing*, and moving his arms like pistons.

"You can come in now, dear," called Aunt Adelaide's voice.

His skin hot with expectancy, Tony entered. Aunt Adelaide and his mother were standing with folded hands to enjoy his first sight of the engine. And there on the bare table—there was the . . . A twist at his heart; a catch where his breath came from; and a gathering warmth at his eyes. His mouth dropped and his lower lip twitched. The engine was humming

along the mahogany, for Aunt Adelaide in her playful delight had started it going. And it was only set in motion by winding string round a fly-wheel and pulling the string sharply away. Aunt Adelaide was holding in her hand the string she had used.

He stared at it with raised eyebrows. Whoever saw a real engine like that, with a fly-wheel where the boiler ought to be, and a body much too short, and a funnel as tall as a factory chimney?

He glanced up and saw them beaming at what they conceived to be his open-mouthed wonder and delight.

That moment he learned something of the beauty of social duplicity: he saw that, because Aunt Adelaide was obviously so excited about her gift, he must pretend to love the engine and must say it was perfect; he saw, however dimly, that life could run in a channel quite indifferent to one's dreams, and that since the mistake lay with one's dreams rather than with life, there was little sense in feeling angry or displaying pain. He gave his Aunt the big hug and the kiss, which she accepted with a bending graciousness.

"There, there. I'm glad you like it." And she turned to his mother. "It was safer to get him one like that. They don't notice the difference." For Aunt Adelaide, as Tony had noticed, was one of those who always thought that children weren't listening unless they were personally addressed. "Now, dear," she concluded, "you'll like to play with it on the table. And your Aunt Adelaide has a lot of shopping to do. Good-bye, dear. So glad you like it. And a very, very happy birthday."

Escorted by his mother, she left the room, quite flushed with her triumph.

Tony wound the string, pulled it, and set the engine going; and as it purred along the table-top, he supplied from his mouth the absent *chuff chuff* and the *sissing*. But he could not do it with any zest. Only when his mother returned did he begin a loud and lively humming, lest anyone should be disappointed.

CHAPTER III

TONY WAKING

IN the Autumn term of '97, when he would be just nine years old, Tony was to go to Colet Court. So Colet Court, as the summer of that year drew to its close, loomed very near, very massive, and rather dark; and its largeness and darkness, somehow, were increased by the news that Derek, who was now in one of its higher forms, had actually won a prize. This gave the school an unusual solidity: Tony's mental eye could always see its great red-brick buildings on one side of the Hammersmith Road, with the still greater red-brick buildings of St. Paul's School on the other side, and the river of traffic rolling between; he could see the small knickerbockered boys going into the gate of Colet Court, and the tall trousered boys swinging into the gardens of St. Paul's (Keatings one of them now); and he had his own impression of the large Main Hall of Colet Court, with its galleries of class rooms all round, which would frame that fine scene wherein Derek, in his Eton suit, would walk up to the platform and take his prize, while a multitude applauded.

No one seemed quite to understand why Derek had been given a prize. Such a thing had never happened before. Keatings was of opinion that the mental level of the Upper Second must be lower than in his day; and Joyce suggested that they had really given a dull child a prize for perseverance. Derek himself employed the news as a release for his congenital pomposity and at breakfast one morning, when the prize was being wrangled about, proclaimed, "Well, anyhow, I'm glad it has happened. I feel I've made it easier for Tony when he comes next term;" at which Dr. O'Grogan roared with laughter, inquiring what possible advantage could accrue to Tony, and Keatings commented, "Don't be more of an idiot than you can help, Derek. You've done nothing very wonderful." Derek

was unabashed, and retorted, "Of *course* the kiddy brother of a fellow in one of the Firsts has a better chance than an *absolutely* new boy. So *bad on* !—all."

Was the summer holiday at Freshwater a little spoilt that year, by the day-by-day approach of the huge school? Certainly there was nothing in Tony's face, with its sparkling, irreverent eyes, to hint it; he was liveliness itself—never before so noisy or so enthusiastic. Almost there was something ostentatious about his gaiety.

One sharp day—a day of misbeatings and fluctuations of the heart—and the boundary was crossed: Tony was a Coletine, wearing a dark blue cap with a Maltese cross. Now a knicker-bockered Norfolk suit had dismissed for ever the white sailor suits and brown stockings of a governess's child. One rather nervous week, most of whose fears were started by smells, such as the smell of hot pipes and radiators, or the smell of varnished lockers and brand-new text books, or the smell of cedarwood pencils in the Art School—one such week, and all the fears were overpast: he could wonder what they had been about. He found that his form master, Mr. Spaul, considered him "quick;" and on a day towards the end of the first month he scored his first goal at football, which drew from an enormous boy who was captaining his side the word, "You'll come on, O'Grogan Minor; you've got speed." A potent semen, that word of the enormous boy! Tony who had been within an ace of disliking this football now discovered that he loved the game and wished to talk of nothing else, so there can be little doubt that this first goal and the captain's encomium were the primal cause of Tony's getting his First XI colours, four years later. And the honest truth is that the goal was accidental.

Tony's cap with the Maltese cross was no longer new; that was the symbol. Purposely he had kicked it about the asphalt of the playground to destroy its damning newness, and now when he put it on its head, the silver tinsel was tarnished and bristly, and the lining hung down behind.

Most of the days that followed, becoming "samey" like the old days with his governess at home, sank out of memory's sight. A few stood vividly embellished: the days when he took prizes, the sunny afternoons when he distinguished himself in the School Sports, the two famous half-holidays when his father took the family to the theatre, once to see *The Sign of*

the Cross, and again to see *Julius Cæsar*. Of these two plays the children much preferred *The Sign of the Cross*; and for weeks after seeing it, Tony, who had quite misunderstood the nature of the Roman officer's assault on the Christian girl, would seize a pen, whensoever Peggy threatened violence, and hold it above his head like a cross, and declare, "Thou canst not harm me now!" But one day there was which stayed in memory, lit with a troubled brilliance: it was the day when he first saw the new boy, Wavers.

Something that was to be an ascendant factor in Tony's youth came alive that day. It had been waiting to come alive for years. It had peeped in strange imaginings which he had revealed to nobody, because he was rather ashamed of them. Was it to be believed, for instance, that at one time when he had persuaded himself, thanks to a story just read, that he loved his father better than anyone else in the world, he would devote the long hour of Morning Service to creating a fine drama in which his father charged him with a crime he had never committed—say one of Derek's—and took him into his study and caned him—this scene would thrill Tony as much as the scene in *The Sign of the Cross* of the whipping of the Christian boy, Stephanus—and he accepted the punishment with a wonderful dignity, refusing to betray Derek and forgiving his father the mistake? But this love for his father and a later love, deliberately induced, for Peggy, had been secret gifts to his imagination, in which he had never really believed. Something different, something much more real, entered him this day, when at four o'clock he came out of the school buildings and saw little Wavers standing on the gravel.

Tony was now eleven years old and flowering well as a school-boy. His fellow Coletines seemed to like him, and adults found attractive the way in which he would utter the slang and enthusiasm of a boy in a girl's soft voice, more beautiful than it would have been good for him to know. Social success was coming as easily to him, it appeared, as to his father. And to-day he was feeling extraordinarily successful, for he had spent the last hour of the afternoon under Monsieur Manise, the French master, and by some excellent clowning had reaped the laughter of his class-fellows. The music of that laughter was still in his head; he was feeling somewhat as Dr. O'Grogan would feel when leaving St. Austin's church, with the phrases of a successful sermon dancing in his memory.

The clowning had played around the matter of an imposition due from Tony to Monsieur Manise.

"O'Groh-gahn," called M. Manise at the opening of the class, "please shoah me your ten French vairbs."

With a man who pronounced like that how could one do other than clown? Tony, his mien expressing alternately protest and resignation, walked up to the master's platform and dramatically laid upon his desk a couple of sheets of white foolscap. Then he opened his coat, put the fingers of each hand in a waistcoat pocket, and stared at the ceiling.

Now M. Manise had a rule that impositions must be written on a special brand of blue paper that could be purchased from the Office at ten sheets a penny; which rule the boys most strongly resented because it added to the writing of the imposition, which was punishment enough, the gross injustice of a penny fine. Alone among the eccentricities of a French master this one passed beyond amusement. Tony, in full accord with this indignation had therefore deliberately written all his verbs on white paper. It was the first act in a little comedy that he was staging.

M. Manise picked up the imposition and glanced at it.

"But this is on hoo-ite paper," he complained; and turned the foolscap round, rather as if he expected it to be blue on the other side.

Tony continued to gaze in abstraction at the ceiling.

"But this is on hoo-ite paper," repeated M. Manise.

"Is it, Moss-soo?" asked Tony in surprise; and, bringing his eyes down from the ceiling, he took the foolscap and examined it inside and out, now holding it up to the light and now extending it at arm's length. There was no rebutting the master's allegation, so he allowed it. "It is hoo-ite, certainly, Moss-soo."

The boys giggled.

"Hoo-igh have you not done it on blue paper?"

Tony shrugged. "No money, Moss-soo. Dreadful poor." And he dropped his head sadly, his toe describing a coy, girlish circle on the floor.

"I will not accept it," M. Manise declared. "Noah, noah."

"No?" inquired Tony, aggrieved.

"Noah, certainly not." The laughter of the boys had angered the master, who pushed the foolscap back into Tony's hands. "You will do it all again."

"Oh, Moss-soo!" protested Tony. "Moss-soo!" In his note rang a mingling of shock, disappointment and forgiveness.

"It is so. I have said it. Go to your seat."

"But Moss-soo——" began Tony, appealingly.

"Go to your seat. I do not argue."

"But, Moss-soo, had I had the pennee, I would have bought the blue paper." Tony, like all the boys, had decided that, to penetrate the intelligence of a French master, he must speak very distinctly, rather loud, and in a pidgin-English. "Look here, Moss-soo. *Regardez*." Into the pocket of his knickers went Tony's hand, drawing out a palm full of coppers. "Look. I did receive my pocket money yesterday. Here is one penny. Please take it yourself, and say no more about it."

M. Manise glared at him, his brow flaming.

"That is vary impudent."

"Oh, no, Moss-soo!"

"You are the most impudent boy in the class."

"*Noah, noah!*" protested Tony.

"You are. You will now do the imposition too-ice."

"But, Moss-soo, that is not fair. That is mouldy. You see——" and Tony began an analysis, in which he hoped to make clear the difference between English customs and those of France.

"Go to your seat," roared M. Manise, tearing up the imposition and dashing it into the waste-paper basket. "Vun more word, and I say tree times."

"Three times! Golly!" Tony considered the situation, and finally shook his head over it. "No." No, three times was more than the fun was worth, so he shrugged his shoulders, framed with his lips a disgusted "Well, well!" and walked to his desk, where he sulked, but not without dignity, for the remainder of the afternoon.

School over, the boys filed out to the playgrounds or the street. Tony had delayed behind to buy M. Manise's blue paper, and when he passed through the big doors on to the gravel between the main buildings and the boarders' house, he was arrested by the sight of a very small new-boy who was waiting there shyly and unhappily. Little Wavers was one of those boys who have the perfection of an immortal's child; his hair was very fair, his features small and straight, his eyes large and wistful, his mouth rich and quick to tremble. Above a face on which "eight years old" was written the school cap

sat ill, and its silver Maltese cross shone dazzlingly new. Tony stopped. Though he did not know what had happened to him, he had, in truth, been stayed and stabbed by beauty of form and feature. Compassion surged in him. He felt compelled to speak to this little boy, to be very kind to him, and to put his arm, should opportunity offer, with paternal encouragement about his shoulder.

"Hallo, what's your name?" he demanded, something roughly, his brain unconsciously seeking to correct this dubious softness.

"Wavers." The large, timid eyes stared up at him.

"Oh. Are you waiting for someone?"

"Yes. I think I must have missed him. Kanes Major said I was to wait for him, as he would take me home. He promised my"—the child flushed with shame—"my mother to do so."

"I see. I understand," Tony answered, generously. "Yes, that's all right. You needn't be afraid to tell me. Somebody's supposed to see you home. Well, look here, I will, if you like." A thrill went through him at the idea. "My name's O'Grogan. I've been here three years now, but I remember how beastly it was in one's first few days. Come on. Where do you live?"

"In Comeragh Road, West Kensington."

"Well, that's right out of my way, but I'll go with you just the same."

"Oh, thanks."

It was an early day of the Lent term, and the sun at four o'clock was already setting. A rosy glamour lay along the Hammersmith Road, and washed the red walls of St. Paul's School. Colet Gardens, the road that ran beside the brick wall of St. Paul's playing field and was the road for Tony and Wavers now, had assumed the only beauty it could ever know, a beauty of light. The stillness that ever seems to partner the sunset filled it from end to end, the tree branches staying motionless above the long brick wall, and the houses on the opposite side gazing at them in a trance.

Neither Tony nor Wavers spoke. Tony was striving for courage to say some words which he was afraid might sound ridiculous; they seemed to have, most strangely, something of the quality of the heightened light in the street; they didn't belong to normal day. After some hundred yards there was a

bend in Colet Gardens, and all people walking round it were then hidden from the windows of Colet Court. For some reason it was not till he was round it that he was able to clear his throat and say the words. "If ever there's anything I can do for you, you must tell me. I feel I should like to help you. I felt it somehow directly I saw you. Funny, wasn't it? Will you let me?"

"Yes, thank you," agreed the little boy, who did not seem at all surprised.

"Good. If ever you want anyone to see you home, I will."

"Oh, thanks awfully."

"Yes, I should like to. Kanes Major doesn't seem very keen on the job, does he? Expect you'd rather I did than he did. Wouldn't you?"

The boy did not answer.

"*Wouldn't you?*" Tony demanded, almost angrily.

"Yes, I think so," agreed Wavers.

"All right, I will."

"But it was only for the first day or two that Mother thought I ought to——"

Tony interrupted at once, his tone nervously huffy. "All right. I won't if you don't want me to."

And as Wavers did not answer this, they walked on in none too happy a silence till they reached the foot of the railway bridge beneath which, in later days, Baron's Court Station was to appear. Here Tony, who had been wondering how to win a response to his interest from this little Wavers, suddenly suggested, "Let's go straight on down Talgarth Road."

"Why?"

"Oh, it won't make the way much longer. And I want to buy something in the North End Road. . . . But hang it, don't do it if you don't want to."

"I don't mind."

"You don't seem very keen on it——"

"Oh yes, I am."

"Sure? Honour bright?"

"Yes."

"Come on, then."

And on they went, Tony glad that he had pushed further from him the moment when he must give up Wavers. Their silence was uncomfortable down Talgarth Road, because Wavers

had nothing to say and Tony had to worry his courage before it would strengthen him to say things which some part of his mind was whispering to be ridiculous. In North End Road was a confectioner's shop, and he walked in and bought four ounces of "Satin Cushions" at two ounces a penny. With these in his hand to give to Wavers, he felt that at last they had a subject of conversation. Wavers was to keep them for himself and give him one as he needed it. Sucking the sweetmeats, they turned at length up Comeragh Road. It was a quiet road of uniform private houses, and empty in this hour of tea-time, when the heightened light of sunset was deepening into a gas-lit dusk. They were very near the end of their journey now, and Tony summed up courage to do what he had been hungering to do from the beginning : he put an arm around Wavers' shoulder and pulled him against him lovingly.

From that evening Tony had an outer life and an inner life strangely contrasted.

His outer life was that of a high-spirited preparatory school-boy just entering upon the spacious places of his seniority and sipping the new wine of athletic success. His success at football was a thing which Derek, who had achieved far less at eleven years old, found difficult to explain. "It's just his speed, that's all," said Derek, implying that his young brother was really no better than most but just chanced to possess this quite extraneous, and perhaps not wholly creditable, gift of speed. Speed Tony certainly possessed. At the School Sports he won the Under 12 Hundred Yards, the Two Hundred and Fifty Yards, and the Quarter Mile ; and Derek hinted that it was because he was so light. Joyce would have none of this. She insisted that there was no getting away from the fact that Tony was a brilliant kid and growing more attractive every day ; and with this as her standpoint she proved a sore embarrassment to him throughout the sports meeting. She was fifteen now, a gushing age ; and on this sunny day her small brother's appearance in his shorts and vest bound with pink ribbon troubled her heart so pleasantly that she kept saying, "Doesn't he look perfectly sweet ?" or "Tony, you look perfectly adorable !" and once she tried to put her arm round his neck. Dr. O'Grogan also, in these days, was awakened to

the positive qualities of his youngest son, and inclined to accord him that affectionate banter one reserves for one's favourites ; and Tony responded to this treatment with his own make of affectionate, clowning impudence.

His inner life was a corridor that ran behind all this gaiety ; a corridor lit with a curious and unreal brilliance, of which he was rather ashamed. Why ashamed he could hardly tell : perhaps it was because he supposed no other boy in the world's history had indulged such thoughts as he. What would Keatings or Derek or any of his noisy schoolfellows say if they knew that he would dawdle about the school gates before the morning prayers to watch for Wavers's arrival ; that he fixed his eyes on him during the whole of Prayers ; that, during the Break, he would wander about the playground alone, in and out of three hundred boys, till he had found Wavers, and when he had found him, could do nothing but toss him a greeting and walk away ; that, when he took Wavers home in the evenings, he would wait till they were in the quiet streets and then put his arm round the little boy's shoulder and hold him close, covering the action with jests ; that he drew an odd delight from calling him by pet names ; that he spent absurd hours at home worrying out the question, did Wavers like him better than any other boy, or did he not ? Was it to be known that he devoted day-dreams to the creation of dramas in which he dived to the rescue of a sinking Wavers and brought him safe to land, perishing himself ; or took Wavers's crimes upon him and their punishment, keeping his silence till the end of life ; or lay on his death-bed in a hospital and summoned Wavers to his side to hear his last farewell ?

No, these things could never be published. If one detail of them leaked out, he would die of shame ; he would kill himself, so terrible would be his humiliation before the world.

What did Wavers really feel for him ? Did he know any of the unrests and aches that Tony knew ? " Of course not," answered the saner part of Tony's mind, " of course not ;" and at the answer his heart fluttered, sank, and died a while.

How could he win the adoration of Wavers ? By a display of his accomplishments ? By a period of neglect, coupled with the flaunting of another friendship ? Then would Wavers be jealous and suffer ? Strange how pleasant it could be, this thought of inflicting pain on the beloved person ! Perhaps Wavers, in a torment of jealousy, would be savagely rude to

him, and then he would punish him—shaking him, perhaps, and giving him a stern blow, and reducing him to tears. His body stirred at the picture. Strange! Why was it sweet as a forbidden drink to imagine himself hurting Wavers.

It was early night as Tony played with these disturbing thoughts; and, worried by them, he went to his bedroom window and looked out upon the narrow garden of the Vicarage. The moon was just rising, and the shadow of the church's apse lay diagonally across the lawn and up the garden wall. As if to counter the advancing moonlight, the lamp from the open window of the breakfast-room flung a splash of golden brushwork over the shadowed grass and lit the individual leaves of a laurel near by. A plane tree beyond spread a few branches towards this illumination and caught it in saucers of light. And in the darkness of the inner branches he could see a congregation of starlings plumply asleep. Happy birds, free from the bewilderments of men!

It was a Friday night and, as on every Friday night that he could remember, the sound of the organ and of the choirboys came from the dimly lit windows of the chancel. From his earliest days this music had worked a melancholy in him, though he could not tell why. To-night he half perceived that its melancholy was bound up with its unreality: he could picture the dark, empty church with only its chancel lamps alight and the boys and the men singing dully and flippantly, because the music had not even a congregation to justify it, still less an emotion. But this was not his chief thought to-night: he thought how normal a thing in his life was the murmur of Choir Practice, and he seemed to see, as in a picture, the stream of normal and natural life flowing on steadily and indifferently, while he alone stood to one side with doubts about the sanity of a secret thought. He envied the choir boys and the choir-men, as he had envied the starlings; they would soon leave the church to go talkatively home, no rooted bewilderment in their minds.

Why did it stir his body to think of hurting Wavers? What would people say if they knew? Resting his elbow on the sill, and his cheek in the support of his palm, he stared down upon the garden, and told himself, while his brow furrowed, "No, I couldn't do that; I couldn't deliberately hurt him;" and yet he knew he *would* do it, so pleasant was it in contemplation. And the knowledge made him afraid. "It's not

unkindness. . . . It's just because I want him. . . . Oh, what would people say if they knew? . . .” Defeated, in this darkening land of thought, he turned back into the room, leaving the future to bring what it would.

Not Wavers alone, and others of the day-boys, but Mr. James also, the Master of the Upper Fifth, walked to his home after school along Colet Gardens. Tony knew of this, and generally allowed all homeward boys, and Mr. James, time to be well out of sight, before he assured Wavers that he was ready to start. Then they dawdled along together, he unruffled by the fear of censorious or ridiculing eyes.

But one afternoon Mr. James had himself been detained at the school and started up Colet Gardens five minutes after Tony and Wavers. He swung round the bend that concealed the further sweep of the road from the windows of the school, and saw two boys sauntering along, a taller, neat-figured boy of about eleven, and a smaller one of between eight and nine. That the elder had his arm along the younger's shoulder did not entirely surprise Mr. James; he had remarked that many Coletines walked in such a fashion with their “chums;” though the difference in these boys' ages made their chumminess strange. On overtaking the two boys he was prepared to give them a nod and a good-night. But recognizing the elder as Dr. O'Grogan's son, he was moved to ask laughingly, “Hallo! You don't live this way, do you, O'Grogan?” and the boy blushed so quickly and hotly and became so tongue-tied that Mr. James was surprised. A kindly man who disliked the sight of discomfort, he only smiled encouragingly and passed on. But a sidelong glance as he rounded a further corner showed him that the two boys were no longer walking linked; and he wondered as he went on.

CHAPTER IV

FINANCIAL OPERATIONS AND A TRADING FAILURE

THE Easter holidays broke across the daily lives of the O'Grogans, playing a merry shaft of light on three weeks ; and then were gone ; and the opening of the Summer term brought them back from the Freshwater cottage to Kensington and its day-schools. It was now that Earl's Court Exhibition began to call to them. That famous enclosure of white palaces, illuminated band-stands, and sixpenny side-shows, once it was opened in May, loomed large to the south of their world. Down certain streets its Great Wheel could be seen revolving above the house-roofs, its shape, after dark, picked out with two concentric circles of light. Sometimes a captive balloon soared up into the sky above the happy gardens. Paulines and Coletines, whose homes were in West Kensington, and therefore nearer the enchanted gates, spoke much of the Water Chute, the goblin grottos, and the Venetian Lake with its gondolas ; of the long bazaars with their Oriental stalls and their smell of joss-stick everywhere ; of the pleasure to be derived, in the summer darkness, from extinguishing the rows of gas-lit fairy lamps by poking them out with a walking stick ; and (if they were older boys, with a bent that way) of girls who would meet them in the Western Gardens and flirt in the illuminated dusk. This made Keatings to deplore and deplore that he had no season-ticket like them, and no pocket-money worth the name. And one morning at breakfast he broke a remarkable conversation on his mother. It was at a time when Dr. O'Grogan was away on a preaching tour in America, and Keatings, now seventeen, was running his peculiar humour into the assumption of a delegated authority, a power of attorney, or—to put it in a word—a regency.

“Mother,” he opened.

"Yes, yes?" Mrs. O'Grogan, that wearied lady, was paying more attention to the bread-board than to her eldest son.

"Mother. You may remember that it was always your desire that I should go as a boarder to Winchester after Colet Court, but that I put my foot down and decided to go as a day-boy to St. Paul's."

"I remember that you quite failed to get the scholarship we hoped for, and so we had to send you to St. Paul's."

"I had no intention of going anywhere else. I—I may say I engineered it."

"Oh, did you?"

"Yes. And it occurs to me now that, since I have saved you such a terrific lot of expense, the least you can do is to increase my pocket money."

"Half-a-crown a week," he added as a suggestion, when his mother seemed in doubt. "And that's letting you make heavily on the whole transaction."

Mrs. O'Grogan looked at him, and probably began to think that it was rather ridiculous to offer anyone so long in the leg the sum of a shilling a week. So she said she thought he might have two shillings every Monday.

Keatings accepted this compromise as a basis of argument, and proceeded to the question of back-payments.

"I've been at St. Paul's four years, and therefore you owe me two hundred and eight shillings, which is more than ten pounds. Still, we'll call it a tenner, if you'd rather."

"You can call it what you like," said his mother. "There'll be no back payments."

"Oh, won't there?" Keatings threatened. "It's a debt, nothing less. I have not pressed for it before, but I need the money now, because I'm going to take Joyce to Earl's Court Exhibition, on the day you go off to meet Daddy. We shall spend a hell of a lot—if you will excuse my manner of speaking."

"Coo!" exclaimed Joyce. "O Mummy, *may* he?"

Up to this point she had been hurrying over breakfast to escape to some imperious occupation that called her; but now she had eyes only for Keatings and her mother.

"It's not a question of 'may,'" Keatings objected. "The whole thing is decided. And as I shall need at least five shillings of my rights, I proceed to call 'em in."

Joyce adopted the feminine method: she jumped up from her chair, ran to her mother, and flung her arms about her neck. "O Mum, *do* let him. Do give him five shillings."

"A truce to these 'lets' and 'gives,'" protested Keatings. "It's not a matter of giving, it's a matter of taking. Mother, what's to prevent me selling some of the furniture to get my rights? I mean, I reckon I've got a claim on some of you' furniture now."

"H'm," scoffed his mother, disentangling the arms of Joyce "and what's to prevent me refusing thereafter to give you any pocket-money at all?"

"Only your sporting sense," Keatings admitted.

"Very good, then. And I don't think my sporting sense would survive the robbery of the furniture."

"Robbery!" Keatings was indignant at the word. "Quite apart from your manifest debts to me, there's the question whether the furniture isn't more mine than yours, and whether in Father's absence I couldn't dispose of some of it according to my discretion. If you won't pay a family debt, I may chose to exercise my discretionary powers and pay it for you. Though it'd be a poor business, paying a debt to myself with furniture that is really, in the long run, mine. It *is*, Mum. Father paid for it, and I'm a nearer blood-relation of his than you are. In fact, you're not related to him by blood at all. You should consider that very carefully when you feel inclined to do the heavy with me—and the stingy."

"I'm his blood relation, too," put in Derek.

"So'm I," reminded Tony.

"You don't count," Keatings snapped, "so shut up. You're simply washed out by my existence. It's a case of what's called primogeniture."

"You may die," Derek suggested, hopefully.

"I think not." Keatings dismissed the point. "And now, Mum, what about it?"

Mrs. O'Grogan's humour was passing into irritation.

"Don't be absurd, Keatings, and don't worry me. I'm not going to give you any back payments; and if you argue any more, I shall take back my offer to give you two shillings a week."

"Oh, you couldn't do that," Keatings reproached her. "You've given your promise. It's on your honour now. And please, I particularly want two and a half weeks' payment

in advance, if convenient. I'll forgo all my other rights, if you'll give me this. Five bob, and I shan't expect anything more for two and a half weeks. There! if that isn't magnanimity, I don't know what is."

"Yes, *do*, Mummy," pleaded Joyce, standing at her side. "Mummy, be intolerably exquisite."

To avoid further pestering—for she well knew that Keatings would walk all round the house after her, into bedrooms and kitchens and pantries, pistolling her with his little slugs of humour—she gave him the five shillings. Joyce skipped with delight.

"I say, thanks awfully," said Keatings. "I'm very pleased with you, as I shall tell Dr. O'Grogan when he returns. Joyce, you can kiss your parent for me."

Joyce did so extravagantly; and a few minutes after was lost in the occupation for which she had been anxious to escape from breakfast.

This was her letter to Mr. Anthony Hope. Joyce, for some time past, had been allotting much of her leisure to a correspondence with the novelists of the day, in which she besought their autographs for her album. At first she had begun this practice as a very diffident experiment, but such success had rewarded her efforts, that it was now become a thrilling and engrossing hobby. Hardly one novelist in twenty had ignored her letter; most had sent along their signatures on postcards, but one or two had replied with friendly and humorous letters. Probably there was something in her naïve superlatives, penned in a round schoolgirl hand, which they found irresistible; and probably, as she advanced in the art of throwing the fly that was to bring the autograph to land, she grew more conscious of this. "I think your books are absolutely some of the best I have ever read, and lots of my friends agree with me," she would write. "We most frightfully want to know how much of them is founded on fact. If you could just tell us this when you send your autograph, we should be awfully grateful. But I daresay you won't take any notice of this letter, in which case I can only apologize for having taken up your valuable time, and, though I shall be very disappointed, I shall at least have the pleasure of thinking that I have said 'Thank you' for all the lovely hours you have given me. Please write a lot more books. Yours truly, Joyce O'Grogan, aged 15."

Sir Walter Besant, Seton Merriman, Baring Gould, Marie

Corelli, Annie Swan, George Meredith—she valued all their signatures equally; it was enough that they had written stories, whether between the linen covers of a book or the paper covers of a magazine, for her to deem them immortal names and offer them their niches in her album. Already she estimated that this collection would soon be worth many thousand pounds and that thus her old age would be provided for.

One of the authors had evidently been so pleased with her letter that he wrote in reply: "No, my heroine had no prototype. She burst into an independent life of her own and had the sauce to reduce me to the position of a mere reporter. But her impulsive enthusiasms and ready impudence gave me much pleasure, and I was quite happy to write at her command. Might I whisper that in these qualities she seems to resemble my present correspondent?"

Here was an exciting compliment which could only be acknowledged in a long letter. Joyce settled down to it, and it quickly became an obliging analysis of her own character. "I only wish I *were* as attractive as your perfectly adorable heroine, but I cannot think I am—no not in my most sanguine moments. I tried to think so all the time I was reading the book, but I was not deceived. I have really only just ordinary intelligence and a little more than ordinary good looks, but not very much more: nothing like as much as I should like. (How badly that is written and how dreadful it must seem to *you*!) No, I've resigned myself to the fact that I am not a Helen of Troy for beauty nor a Sappho for brains. . . ."

The name Sappho had involved her in a long hour of research, chiefly in the accumulated knowledge of Keatings; and after she had written it and sent it off, she was less than content with it.

Her correspondence with Mr. Anthony Hope was only just about to be opened, because it was only in the last weeks that she had discovered his books, but "The Prisoner of Zenda" and "Rupert of Hentzau" once read, had enlisted some of the noisiest suffrages she had ever accorded to the works of man, and now she was looking forward, perhaps more than ever in her life before, to the composition of her introductory letter. She hurried from the dining-room to the breakfast-room to give it her quiet consideration.

Meanwhile the mind of Tony, after hearing Keatings' talk of Earl's Court Exhibition, had been filling with its own private

picture of those illuminated gardens. He saw the dense ring of people parading slowly round the brightly lit band-stand, where the scarlet grenadiers were playing; he saw the gay Oriental stalls and smelt their cedar-wood and burning joss-sticks; he saw the long lake with the white palaces around it and the white bridges spanning it, and the golden fairy-lamps throwing their reflections upon the water—a water troubled, now and then, by the passing of a gondola. And with this picture came, quickly and exhilaratingly, an idea. How splendid it would be to play the generous and wealthy patron with Wavers; to give him a memorable day there; to thrill with him down the Water Chute and up and down the Switchback; to visit the side-shows; and, at the end of it all, to parade in lordly ease round the band-stand! Surely—surely such a treat would wake in the boy the adoration he desired. Three or four shillings would go a great way with himself and Wavers, because they would pass every turnstile at half-price. And he had four shillings left of the five-shilling-piece his god-father had given him. Could he spend it all on Wavers? Was his love real enough for that? Yes—yes, rather!

It was ten minutes after two on a Wednesday afternoon, and Tony was back again in the inner and secret corridor of his life. He was standing on the pavement of North End Road, outside the gates of Earl's Court Exhibition, waiting for Wavers, not doubting that it was a shameful, unpublishable matter that his heart should be beating so excitedly. Wavers was coming at half-past two, having agreed that it would be much jollier if they kept the adventure secret. Over a shop across the busy road there was a clock whose hands Tony studied whenever he was not directing a searchlight glance to the corner round which Wavers would first appear. But he was telling himself that he must accept a long wait cheerfully, because it was due to his own stupid impatience in coming twenty minutes too soon. He rattled the money in the pocket of his knickers. One minute of savage, almost tearful rebellion passed over him, when a leaden cloud obscured the sun and speckled the pavement with thunder-drops; but it passed with the cloud, and he clod-hopped his relief and thanksgiving, to feel the sun pouring warmth on his cheeks again. The clock now pointed to twenty

past two, and he could legitimately play the beam of his gaze on Wavers's corner, because Wavers would surely be before his time, rather than after it.

The minutes, from passing slowly, suddenly began to pass quickly, alarmingly quickly; already it wanted but two minutes to the half-hour and Wavers had not appeared. "Always a rather unenthusiastic little beast, Wavers," thought Tony; why couldn't he come early and be as keen as his treater. Ah, perhaps his lunch had been late. Resolved to be cheerful, Tony accepted this as the certain explanation. He might even be a quarter of an hour late. The minute hand left the half-hour and climbed towards three o'clock; and Tony, refusing to admit a sinking of the heart, walked merrily to Wavers's corner and looked up the road. It was empty.

Still holding grimly to happiness, he wandered back to the Exhibition gates. Evidently Wavers was coming by some other way. A quarter to three. Well, a quarter of an hour was nothing. Just once more he would walk to the corner of Charleston Road . . . Tony's breath halted as he neared the corner—halted with anxiety—then—oh, contemptible idiot that he was! the tears of anger welled up and his heart seemed extinguished. The road was still empty, except for a woman toiling home with a string bag of parcels.

Back to the Exhibition gates, anger now mounting higher; and, mounting with it, the old pleasurable idea of punishing Wavers. . . . No, he pushed that thought from him; he was afraid of it; it heightened his imagination so. And he was *not* a bully. In every school story he had read the bully had been the villain whom he hated and despised; and how utterly absurd it would be to call him the bully of Wavers, when his one desire was to make a fuss of him!

Five to three. If Wavers came before three o'clock, even though only one minute before, he would forgive him, treating the unpunctuality as a pleasant jest. "Ding-dong-dang'd-dong." A church with a cracked bell was beginning to strike the four quarters; and each of its blows, especially that on the cracked bell, struck on Tony's nerves and *clang'd* among his heart-beats. Till the last stroke of three he would keep the door of his forgiveness open. Racking seconds, as the bell went mechanically on! The last beat of three o'clock dissolved into the air above the traffic, and the street was just the same as before: shoppers loitering on the pavement, a coster crunching his barrow of

fruit in the gutter, and carts and omnibuses lumbering along the roadway.

Angrily, miserably, he swung into the Exhibition entrance, paid his half-price at the turnstiles, and passed through. He found himself in pleasure gardens that seemed deserted of everything except the bathing sunlight. The empty green chairs round the empty band-stand; the unlit fairy-lamps outlining the white façades of the side-shows; the stillness of the Great Wheel where it towered above the canvas scenery at the vista's end—all these things oppressed him with a heavy melancholy. Set against his own unhappiness, they revealed to him, probably for the first time in his life, how artificial was much of men's pleasure, and therefore how pitiful and how courageous. He walked on dully, between the empty bandstand and the empty chairs. Dull! Well, he wasn't going to be made miserable by a little idiot of a nine-year-old. Just imagine: if anyone sitting at home could read his thoughts across the distance and was watching his mind now and knew all that he was thinking! A shudder passed up him. They would put him in a lunatic asylum, surely. No, he was not going to be made miserable; he was going to enjoy himself. He could spend all his money on himself now.

So he visited the side-shows that attracted him, and was surprised that performances which, undoubtedly comic, must have lifted him on other days to loud laughter, this afternoon only saddened him. He had a run on the Switchback, and, though he would not allow it, the reaction into sadness after the breath-arresting rush, was as miserable a collapse as he had known. He visited the Lake and the turn-stiles at the foot of its dizzy Water Chute; and in loyalty to his fiction of happiness, decided to spend his last sixpence here. Following a score of other thrill-hunters, he entered the lift and was drawn up the steep incline of the Chute to its platform high in the air. From this eyrie he could overlook the whole of London, and he leant an elbow on its rail and did so. How depressing, how pitiable seemed that vast, huddling congregation of little houses, whose meagre smoke wormed up into the sunlight and died! What flies the people looked where they moved in Lillie Road! And what an infinitely tiny thing was the disappointment of a prep-schoolboy down there! And here at the foot of the Water Chute—his head went a little swimmy as he looked down—the white palaces

of the Exhibition and its blue lake, set in the midst of that huddled, multitude of houses, spoke to him once again, and with cutting potency now, of a tawdriness, and a pitifulness in much of the pleasure men shaped for themselves. That moment, while his elbow rested on the rail, he was apprehending something of the world's grief. What though the June sky was reflected in that lake, and the sun was gilding the cupolas of the palaces and burnishing the sea-wide swarm of slate-roofs all around? It seemed only to stress a sorrow that it could not heal.

"Ain't you comin', Kiddy?"

The sailor who would pilot the boat down the Chute and over the lake was addressing him.

"Oh . . . rather!"

Quickly Tony stepped into a seat behind six giggling girls and beside two young men who removed their straw hats, guards and all, and put them between their knees for safety.

"Hold tight, all."

The boat tilted forward; the girls shrieked at the movement; they shrieked louder as it slid down the steep declivity; they held their shrieks as it gathered speed and plunged through an air that battened down one's breath in one's lungs; the young men's hair was flying backward and their lips compressed; for an unbearable second no one did aught but hold tight to the rails; and then the girls screamed again, half in terror and half in delight, as the boat hit the water with a mighty slap and shot its head into the air, plumes of spray breaking to its left and right, and bumped and bumped along the water, and bumped more quietly, and bumped a last time, and slowed into a smooth motion under the low arch of a white bridge.

All, the girls and the young men, breathed "Ah!" in relief, and straightened hair or hats, and laughed out a description of their experience.

"I'm glad I done it, mind you, but never agyne!"

"Lor-lummy, I thought I was dead!"

"I thought I was going to cat over your back, Nell, straight I did!"

"Oh, you horrid!"

"I'm not sure I shan't do it yet."

"You better!" . . .

"I didn't like it. It was like what you feel going down in a lift, only ten times worse. When I go down in a lift,

my stomach always goes down with me, but not my dinner—at least not at once.”

“ Oh, ain’t he *awful*, Nell.”

But Tony, sitting alone behind and beside them, had never for one moment been caught up into jollity by their screaming and laughter : only stabbed into dejection. This day there seemed to be little but an unreality and a despair in the world’s laughter. If any emotion other than his settled sadness had accompanied the boat’s abandoned career, it was a feeling of desperate abandonment in himself : “ What does anything matter ? What does it matter if we’re overturned at the bottom and drowned ? Go as fast as you like, *I* don’t care.”

His last coin spent, he left the Exhibition, and, declining to accept the fact of his depression, walked the roads between Earl’s Court and Kensington, to a tune of his humming.

CHAPTER V

THE PUNISHER

NEXT morning he went to Colet Court with a little programme of private theatricals spread out in his mind. He had prepared a rôle for performance in front of Wavers and conned it well ; and though he despised the rôle, he knew he would play it. He would not speak to Wavers nor notice him, and when the child came up with his explanations he would walk away ; he would keep the child dawdling around him in search of reconciliation ; and at last he would grant it. And then perhaps a richer intimacy—something a few degrees nearer the perfect thing he desired, would be the fruit of this forgiveness and this reconciliation.

He acted the part in the playground during Eleven o'clock Break. Espying where Wavers was, he contrived to pass him with an arm linked through the arm of a distinguished boy of his own age ; when the older boys began their game of "Hot Rice" and some of the younger boys, including Wavers, sat on the wooden rails and watched them, he made it his task to appear the noisiest, happiest, and most successful player ; and finally, the game over, he strolled with unseeing eyes near Wavers, that the offender might approach him with apologies, and he act his majestic "walk away."

But Wavers did not move. He simply sat on his rail, a smile of greeting ready to break over his so troublingly beautiful little face, should Tony look his way. Good heavens ! Wasn't he even going to apologize ? Did he think it a little matter to have failed in his appointment ? Had the offer of a whole afternoon at Earl's Court Exhibition seemed so small a thing to him ? Extending his stroll, Tony looked quickly back, only to learn that Wavers had not moved from his rail, nor was watching him as he went ; and his next few minutes were pain

—an ache of pain—in which angry pride struggled against his longing for Wavers, but struggled at losing odds. Time was short, and in two minutes the longing had won. He strolled back and passed Wavers.

“Hallo!” he exclaimed, as if noticing him for the first time. “You didn’t turn up yesterday afternoon.”

“No. My people wouldn’t let me.”

“Oh—why?”

“I don’t know. Some silly idea of theirs.”

“But why did you tell them? We agreed it was going to be a secret. What was the sense in telling them. . . . Oh, but it doesn’t matter——”

He wasn’t going to continue; he walked slowly away. It was something very different from the haughty “cut” he had imagined. There had fallen on him the final certainty that Wavers was quite untroubled by any real affection for him, and he felt he must walk back in search of his pride, with whose aid he would worry out the misery of it alone.

After Prayers that afternoon the Headmaster was waiting at the door of his study as the boys poured past it through the vestibule, on their way to freedom. His appearance was that of a person waiting for a particular boy. And to Tony, of all that streaming crowd, he beckoned. “O’Grogan, I want you to speak to me a minute. I want you to do something for me, if you will.” This explanation was offered in a manner of marked kindness, perhaps to save the boy from any suspicion of disgrace. Tony caught its note and followed the headmaster into his study unsuspectingly. The room seemed friendly, too, with its thick red carpet offering to the feet a softness that was strange within the walls of a school. The afternoon sun slanted through open windows on to a chair pleasantly littered with books. There was a vase of flowers brightening the large desk, and two more on either side of the clock on the mantelpiece. For no clear reason, however, Tony turned a little afraid, as the headmaster closed the door.

This chill of fear the headmaster quickly dispersed by tossing off his gown on to the revolving chair behind the writing table, as if all official duties were done, and sitting down and crossing his legs, and beginning a most interesting conversation about Tony and Tony’s family. He talked about Tony’s success in his class; he asked how he liked his football and cricket; he inquired after his parents and whether his father was back from

America; and he expressed a hope that Keatings was doing well at St. Paul's and that Derek had quite settled down there. Then, just as Tony was telling him of Keatings' prospects of getting into the Second XV at St. Paul's next term—in the scrum, of course, because he wasn't fast enough for the three-quarter line—the Head, who seemed to have wool-gathered and missed what he was saying, broke in on the subject of Tony himself, and declared that he was sure he was going to do well at Colet Court—very well indeed. He spoke of making the most of good abilities, and divulged that Mr. Giveen had described him as "one of the clearest minds that had ever passed through his hands." He said, why not aim at a scholarship *and* the First XI? There seemed good reason for hoping that he might do both; then would he indeed be an honour to his school. He asked who were his chief friends, and Tony mentioned the two Hewetts and Candler and Soule Major. "Yes, yes," nodded the Head inattentively, "Candler and Soule. . . . Candler and Soule. . . ."

Suddenly he smiled. "But you seem very fond of young Wavers, don't you?"

Tony had no answer, and oh, hateful! he felt the warmth rising over his face and steaming under his hair. Happily the Head did not see it; one could suspect he made it his business not to see it.

"Well, that's excellent," continued the Head encouragingly. "Only . . . only . . ." and after a cough and a clearance of his throat, he began again, "I don't think, O'Grogan, if I were you, I would make a favourite of a young new boy—and walk home with him—and give him sweets, you know—and invite him to the Exhibition. It's very nice of you—exceedingly nice of you—but we think—his parents and I—that it's better for him to be left alone to—er—fight his own battle in his own ranks in the school. You mean well, I know, but the favouritism of an elder boy is not always the best thing for a young one; it might hold him up to ridicule, you see . . . and takes him away from those who ought to be his companions . . . and all sorts of things. You with your clear brain can see all that, I am sure."

Tony still stared, unanswering, while the heat distilled to drops on his brow.

"So this is what I want you to do for me. I want you to give me a definite promise now that, for this term at any rate,

you will leave young Wavers entirely alone. By that I mean that you are to have no dealings with him at all. We want to see how he will shape, if he is left quite undisturbed among the boys of his own age. Do you see: you've said your last word to Wavers for the remaining six weeks of this term—that's the experiment. It's for his own good, so I am sure you will help us, if you're fond of him, won't you?"

Still no answer came from Tony, in whom language had congealed. His brain was clear enough to see that however the Headmaster, of his good nature, might pretend otherwise, he really disapproved of his affection for Wavers; which meant that some of the lunacy in his secret thoughts was suspected and talked about and probably ridiculed; and that was awful—unthinkable—shiveringly unthinkable!

"That's right," accepted the Head, just as if Tony had given the promise. "I think that's all I wanted to say. Except that I thank you for all the help you've tried to give a new boy. It was good of you, O'Grogan, but more would be a mistake."

Since Tony did not reply, the Head got up and, putting his hand on his shoulder, said: "Well, you can go now," and patted his back encouragingly.

When the school assembled for Prayers next morning, with the usual back-chat and horse-play passing between boy and boy, there was nothing in the manner of Tony, where he stood far back among the enlarging lads of the upper forms, to show that the searchlight of his gaze was playing among his incrowding schoolfellows for a sight of one figure only. And since he laughed often there was nothing to show that he sought a view of this person in order to rest his gaze on him and heighten the aching of a bruised place in his heart. A fixed look in one direction throughout Prayers there was, and nothing more. And in class that morning there was nothing in O'Grogan Minor, who dealt very creditably with Ovid's *Tristia* and had many bright moments in his Divinity hour, to show that he was indulging a sick despair. Nothing, because he lapsed into inattention no more often than he always did, and as a day-dreamer he had quite a reputation.

During the Break he kicked a tennis ball about the asphalt playground with, apparently, as good a will as the rest; but, in truth, he was enduring a miserable quarter of an hour, because he had seen Wavers playing in happy indifference with some of his class-mates. His pain blew up for anger.

At four o'clock that afternoon when the school was dismissed he drifted to the entrance and waited to see the passing of Wavers. Last night he had pictured for this hour a following of the boy along Colet Gardens, a hailing of him in the quiet round the corner, and then a parting, not unsentimental in its language and hand-clasps. But he did not expect that now. What he expected he did not know. Just for this evening he had suspended his will from control; he was an ungoverned city, listless, and awaiting the chances of the night.

It was an ill chance that Wavers should come out, merrily laughing, with a chum to whom he had lately been showing all the concentrated devotion that Tony had tried to buy. Like a pair of puppies these two romped on the gravel, before separating with such shouted abuse and thrown stones as only the best of schoolboy friends accord each other. Wavers, satchel on hip, was now walking up Colet Gardens alone; and Tony, unseen of him, followed. For what purpose he could not have said; he was too unhappy to know. When Wavers rounded the bend, Tony broke into a velvet-padded sprint, and in ten seconds was within a few yards of his quarry. Quieting to an easy walk, he called naturally :

"Hallo !"

Wavers swung round. "Hallo, O'Grogan."

Tony opened genially.

"You're a fine chap, aren't you? You've barely so much as thanked me for my invitation to the Ex. Even if your people wouldn't let you go, you might have behaved like a gentleman."

"Oh, I'm sorry," said Wavers. "I wanted to come."

"No, you didn't."

"Of course I did."

"Well, what did you want to tell your people all about it for? We arranged that it was to be a secret. You're a little sneak."

"I'm not."

"How did they know about it, then?"

"I told my kiddy sister and she sneaked, and Mother asked me straight out if it was true. I've often talked to them about you, you see."

"Oh, have you? And what did they say?"

"Shan't tell you."

Tony seized his arm above the elbow, and crushed it in his grip. The pleasure this brutality gave him bewildered and distressed his mind.

"Oh yes, you will."

"Don't! You're hurting."

"Tell me what they said."

"You wouldn't like it."

"Never mind that! Tell me!" He gave the boy a sharp shake that nearly threw him off his feet.

"I—I'll tell you. . . . They said you were rather absurd. Daddy said you were soft, and the whole business was sammy."

"Oh, did he? . . . did they? . . ." Under these contemptuous words Tony concealed the knife-thrust that Wavers' revelation had given him, and the throbbing of the wound that resulted. "Well, look here, young Wavers: I'm not so soft that I don't punish people who betray my confidence. I'm going to give you a lamming. Now. See?"

Wavers tried to wrench himself free.

Excited, exulting, Tony seized Wavers's other arm above the elbow and pushed him backwards against the red-brick wall that surrounded the playing fields of St. Paul's. He pinioned him there by resting his weight on his arms.

Wavers stared at him, terrified; and shame and pity began to move in Tony at the sight of that stricken face.

"All right. I shan't hurt you much, kid," he began.

At the word "hurt" Wavers, in his fright, made another quick effort to escape; and Tony, taken by surprise and enraged at the trick, gripped him more savagely and thrust him so sharply against the wall that the back of his head struck the bricks with a stunning blow. The child turned suddenly pale and looked as if about to faint.

"Oh! . . ." cried Tony, in alarm. "Wavers, I didn't mean to do that. I swear I didn't!"

He had instantly released the boy, who now turned on one side and put his hand against the wall to save himself from falling. His head hung down.

"Wavers! . . ." begged Tony, almost shouting, as if to reach a retreating consciousness. "I'm frightfully sorry. Are you all right? Shall I help you along?"

Wavers turned on him. He was only stunned and dizzy, but looked terribly sick and ill. Proud of his wounded state and conscious of his perfect security now, he hissed:

"Beast! I think you've killed me."

"Wavers!" pleaded the beaten Tony. "It isn't really bad, is it? I didn't mean to, I swear I didn't."

Wavers put his hand to the back of his head, and drawing it away, saw a red stain in the hollow of his fingers, which terrified him more and turned him paler.

"Let me bind it up for you. You'll be all right soon," Tony assured him, for his own comfort.

"My skull's cracked, I think."

"O Lord!" cried Tony, tears of desperation now welling up. "No, it isn't. It can't be. You didn't go hard enough for that. It only feels like it. But I say, I'm awfully sorry."

"What's the matter, O'Grogan? What's happened?"

Tony looked up into the face of Mr. James. Not an unkind face, but a Gorgon's face to Tony now, petrifying him. His brain stood still.

"What's happened, O'Grogan? Speak, boy. Tell the truth; don't stare!"

As in front of the Headmaster, Tony was dumb.

"Wavers, what is it? Are you ill, Wavers?"

"My head hit against the wall."

"How? Turn round and let me see. . . . Yes, it's bleeding a little. How did it happen?"

Two months earlier Wavers would not have hesitated to explain passionately how it happened, but he had just been introduced to the schoolboy ban on sneaking and he hesitated to disclose the truth, at least while Tony was still present. He looked at the ground instead, and soon it was plain from a lifting and falling of his shoulders that sobs had forced their way up, at the call of this new sympathy.

"What's happened, O'Grogan?" persisted Mr. James.

But Tony was still dumb. Dumb with horror: would Wavers tell?

"O'Grogan, tell the truth; you are the elder. This child's hurt. I shall have to walk back with him to his parents. Did he just fall or something? . . . Speak, boy. Don't you see, O'Grogan, if you keep silence, I shall suspect you've been hurting him. Are you going to speak?"

How could he speak? He had nothing to say. How could he tell of love, and love's desire to hurt?

"Very well, then. Go home. I shall take Wavers home. We shall have to get to the bottom of this. Go along."

Tony went. There was little thought in his mind, only fragments and starting fears and sudden sick horrors, as he walked along Hammersmith Road and into Kensington Road

and up his own familiar pavements, like a dazed bird, homing instinctively. Wavers would tell; of course he would; they would say that they would have to know—or that it would make no difference if he told or not, because silence meant the same thing. They would explain that it wasn't sneaking, and he would tell. He was telling now. In his sitting-room in Comeragh Road he was telling his parents and Mr. James.

Life was collapsing around the youngest O'Grogan.

As soon as Home Work was finished that night there were games in the Vicarage breakfast-room, and its hall, and up and down its stairs; and Tony played in them with an artificial gaiety that he had raised like a lath-and-plaster screen between the eyes of men and his inner fears. If Derek or Peggy glanced his way during his periods of inattention, he quickly provided them with a wide smile. At nine o'clock the younger children went to bed, and Tony escaped to his with relief. He was impatient for the warmth and the darkness and the silence. This desire for warmth, though really a mental need, became a suggestion of physical cold, and he shivered as he removed his shirt and vest. He hastened into bed and hunched up his body and gathered the clothes tight about him. Ten o'clock came, and the steps and laughter of Keatings and Joyce, as they too mounted to their rooms. Eleven o'clock, and the house was quiet, except for the intermittent opening and shutting of his father's study door. His father was writing his letters, as he nearly always did at this hour, and soon he would take them to the pillar-box, fifty yards down the road, in time to catch the midnight post. Then he would return, bolt and chain the door, and creak upstairs to bed.

Tony waited for this last episode. For some absurd reason such as only a child's mind can hold, he felt that he could not think out his fearful pass till all these noises were over and the house abed. So he arrested his thinking, till he heard his father open the hall-door; heard his steps diminishing down the pavement; heard him returning—but after how long a time!—heard him slide the bolts and climb the stairs to his room. Now Tony could release the machinery of his thought. He rearranged his position in the bed, the movement making him shiver again.

The naked Fact: let him look at it. He had been caught bullying. And Wavers would reveal the exact truth—let him admit no spurious consolation—Wavers would reveal that O’Grogan had been bullying him. Tony’s despair at the knowledge, for he believed from his school-stories that bullying was a crime which met with no social forgiveness, was not a shade less black than that of a man who had embezzled his thousands of trust funds and knew that his theft must be discovered in the morning. By nine o’clock to-morrow the Headmaster would know; possibly he would announce it to the whole school at Prayers. By lunch-time his parents would know, and Keatings and Joyce and Derek—Derek! Derek, with his heavy conscientiousness, was the most alarming of all. The servants would know, and their presence in the dining-room would be awful. The congregation of St. Austin’s would know and flutter its sea of heads when he entered church on Sunday. The long, quiet road, whose pavements he must daily tread, would stare at him from a hundred curious, hostile windows. And there was nothing he could do—nothing. Nothing could put back the clock. Time would not retreat behind four o’clock in the past afternoon, so that what had happened then might be as if it had never been. It was securely set in the imperishable metal of time.

Only eleven years old, and he had ruined his life. Probably he would be expelled, and expulsion, so every school-story warned you, was the hall-mark of ruin. From now onward it was his sentence to wear a disgrace that would be pointed at and whispered about, among whomsoever he walked. The Fact was ice-cold.

The despair was so complete that it led him to the sleep of exhaustion, only to draw him back from it, after flushing his dreams with unhealthy, brain-heating visions. Again and again it dipped him in this hot sleep, from which he was glad to wake with a start and turn round in his bed. Often he opened his eyes and stared into the darkness, and once he saw that the darkness was greyer than it had been. Was it the dawn—yes—and as the grey light directed his perceptions to the bird-song in the plane trees, his breathing became short and quick like asthmatic breathing: he realized that the day of his exposure was creeping over the world.

At the breakfast-table Keatings was humorous and Joyce was lively, and Peggy lost her temper once and was so rude

that everyone, from her father downwards, roared with laughter at her. Tony smiled dutifully at the fun, and once provided an audible laugh; but this laugh sickened him, and his throat nearly closed to his porridge and his toast. Only hot tea seemed a welcome thing.

In the hall he put on his Colet Court cap, immediately wondering if it would be the last time he would wear it. The furniture of the hall, and its front door, took on a new individuality, as he wondered with what experience behind him and with what news in his pocket he would return to that door of leaded windows and hang his cap on that crowded hat-stand and read again that framed text: "GOD IS THE MASTER OF THIS HOUSE."

A dull, painless ache settled at his cheek-bones and his temple-bosses, as if both were made of wood, and he picked up his satchel, flung it over his shoulder, and stepped into the street.

His body went cold in the changed air. As he walked down Kensington Road, his thinking had slowed to the thinking of a dull-wit, and his eyes stared widely and unintelligently at the stream of buses, cabs, carts and cycles, rolling citywards. All these people were going happily to work, none to disgrace. The red-brick façade of Colet Court, and the red-walled railings of St. Paul's opposite, with the small, knickerbockered, Eton-collared boys going into the one, and the tall, trousered, high-collared boys going into the other, hardly added to his fear, for he was chilled to immunity. He began to understand how mere women, condemned to death, could walk to the scaffold without the appearance of fear; some petrification of thought, some dull, staring acceptance of the inevitable, chilled them from terror, and they walked on dully; there was nothing else to do. In such a condition he walked into the Large Hall of Colet Court and took his place for Prayers; where he stood, picking his fingers, whistling quietly to himself, and sometimes swallowing with difficulty.

In his state of nervous anticipation he had arrived too early, and the next quarter of an hour seemed twice its length, as the boys poured into the Hall and diverged to their places, and the masters wandered in, drawing on their gowns. The later minutes he gave, with mounting anxiety, to watching for the arrival of Wavers. Not yet was there sign of him. They must be nearly all here now, and still no Wavers. He kept

craning his neck and steering his gaze down avenues in the crowd to distinguish that small, fair head. Once he saw Mr. James instead, and straightway withdrew his body behind the screening body of another boy. Now all three hundred boys stood in their places, waiting for Prayers—all of them, except himself, free from the sickness of doubt and the threat of disaster. All of them here, but no Wavers. Was he not coming? Could he have been hurt as much as that? . . . Hallo, was that him? . . . No, that was only young Rose. . . . Could Wavers, then, be seriously hurt?

Prayers began. The Headmaster announced his favourite hymn, "Brief Life is here our portion," and its words were not empty of comfort for Tony. Life with its pains would be short. . . . It would be all the same a hundred years hence. Then Mr. Spaul said the Collects, and they too rang out with a strange appropriateness—not those for the Queen and for Albert Edward, Prince of Wales—but such a one as said: *We humbly beseech Thee, O Father, mercifully to look upon our infirmities; and for the glory of Thy Name turn from us all those evils that we most righteously have deserved.* . . . Now Prayers were over, and he was being drawn by the file of boys to his classroom. He cast a last look everywhere for Wavers, but the boy was not there.

The sharpest moment in Tony's early years was at about half-past ten that morning, when the door-handle of Mr. Giveen's class-room turned, bringing in the Headmaster who walked up to Mr. Giveen's desk. Indeed, it is doubtful if in all his life came another moment which shot at his heart and cancelled its normal action as this one did. Always such an entry, because it teemed with possibilities, lifted the boys' faces from their writing and stilled the atmosphere. They stared to-day and wondered. Tony looked too—and yet didn't look. He kept his pen-point above his paper and moved it up and down, but it was writing on a plaque of air, for, though his head, resting on the palm of his hand, was bent over it, his eyes were swinging to the gowned Headmaster, where he stood conversing in an undertone with Mr. Giveen. How strange that this solid, hard, round, untrembling body of his could encase a heart that was inflating and deflating, like a frog in a hole! The Headmaster had spoken quite a while with Mr. Giveen before both of them went out of the room on to the gallery beyond. The door did not quite close after them, because

Mr. Giveen was holding it, as they stood talking together; and Tony, whose desk was near the door, could catch the highlights of their conversation: "Monsieur Manise . . . impudent but affectionate. . . . Irish, I suppose, all of them. . . . No, no; can't be overlooked; besides, it's flat disobedience. . . . After the Break is over; then the others won't see." Mr. Giveen answered distinctly: "Yes, I understand," and came back into the room, while the Headmaster's steps receded along the gallery. Now Tony's heart changed to a new speed, waiting to take the words of Mr. Giveen. But Mr. Giveen never once looked Tony's way; he went straight to his desk and continued his work. And the rest of the hour passed.

Not till the bell for Break was drawing the boys in a stream through the door did Tony hear from his master: "O'Grogan, just a minute. I'd like to speak to you." He stopped; and at his side stood Panic as a companion, which returned with him to Mr. Giveen's desk. When all the boys were gone and Mr. Giveen had made sure that they were out of hearing, he began:

"The Headmaster, O'Grogan, wants you to go and see him, but not till the Break is over."

"Y-yes, sir."

"Right. Er—that will do."

Almost the first thing that caught Tony's eyes as he wandered out to the playground was a white bandage round a small boy's head. Wavers, then, had come, and was now a centre of interest to an enlarging crowd of boys. One showman called out: "Come and see the 'Gentleman in Khaki,'" and all understood his allusion, for this was the first year of the Boer War, when patriotic schoolboys wore in the lapels of their coats and the peaks of their caps button-portraits of General Buller and "Bobs" and sang arm-in-arm "The Absent-Minded Beggar," and dressed up with bandages round their brows as "The Gentleman in Khaki ordered South." They hurried up to gaze on this wounded Wavers and to hear his tale. The sight of a crowd with what looked like a bleeding accident in the middle drew yet more enraptured boys from all parts of the playground; they came shouting "What's up?" and "Anyone dead?"—and Tony slunk back into the Hall.

The bell sounded for Second Hour, assembling the boys in groups outside their class-room doors. Tony, when the doors had shut on the boys, walked to the Headmaster's study.

What was the use of waiting till his heart, his breathing, and his nerves steadied? He had best go now. Perhaps, such is the fascination of pain, he was almost anxious to go.

"Come in." The Headmaster's voice answered his knock. "Ah, O'Grogan," he greeted, "come in, come in."

His voice was as friendly as before, but not, somehow, his gown, which, instead of being tossed aside, was in its official place, on his back. And not the room: this morning the flowers on desk and mantelpiece had ceased to express its essence, and had handed over that task to the upturned mortar-board on a side table, and to the leather-bound book in which the Headmaster was writing an entry, and to the wall-cupboard, which was known to hold the cane.

The Headmaster laid down his pen and sat back in his chair.

"You know what I want to see you about, I expect."

As before, Tony only stared dumbly.

"Do you know?"

Tony looked at the carpet.

"Well, well," soothed the Headmaster. "I understand."

Neither spoke now for a little. The Headmaster, lifting his pen up and down on his desk, seemed to be building his sentences.

"I see you know all, or you would tell me you didn't. . . . Well, O'Grogan, I am going to cane you for this—" Tony's heart now raced—"because I must punish you for two things: first, for deliberately disobeying my order that you were to leave Wavers alone, and secondly for something that looks like bullying, though I'm sure the severity of what happened was mainly an accident. . . . But I want you to understand, O'Grogan, that I don't believe you are, or ever will be, a bully. This has been a momentary lapse into cruelty, to which we are all liable, especially—er—in youth. I want you to believe that it will be very easy for you, once we have got this business over, to rehabilitate your good name with me. Will you remember that?"

He seemed to realize that his answer, and his only answer, was coming from Tony's eyes; so continued:

"After this sharp lesson you will be properly afraid of the more selfish and brutal parts that are in your nature as in everyone's. They are the only things of which you are ever to be afraid. Do you see?"

Standing up he took the leather-seated chair, which last

night had looked so pleasantly relaxed under its litter of books, and placed it against a bare wall.

"Kneel there, and bend over."

Tony knelt against the chair, his disordered brain causing him to stumble as he knelt ; and he bowed his head over the leather seat, and its grained pattern dimly interested him. A cupboard door swung to, and the floor creaked. Came the first stinging cut, and five more after it ; to which he gave no tears, but only an involuntary quiver.

"All right," said the Headmaster's voice. "Stand up." Tony stumbled to his feet, and stared at the Headmaster, who touched his shoulder gently.

"Well, that's all, O'Grogan. It's all over now ; do you understand ? We're just where we were before. . . . And now I think you'd better go home. You don't look as if you could do any good work this morning. Come back this afternoon and begin again. . . . Good-bye, good-bye."

Gently he guided Tony to the door.

CHAPTER VI

THE WANDERER

WHERE seven sit down for lunch, a father and mother and five assorted children, there is no great anxiety about an absentee, and no waiting. The first course was nearly completed when Mrs. O'Grogan said, "Tony's late ;" but the subject, thus introduced, was treated by the other children as an uninteresting guest and neglected. The maid cleared away the ruins of the large cottage pie, while Dr. O'Grogan discussed parish gossip with his wife, and Keatings discussed Pauline politics with Derek, and Joyce broke brightly, if ludicrously, into both conversations. Now the maid was bringing in a hillock of suet pudding in a pond of treacle, and Dr. O'Grogan continued his talk over the arriving dish and the following plates.

"Tony's very late," repeated the mother, an extra and embarrassing plate recalling the absentee.

"Kept in," suggested Keatings.

"Even if he'd been kept in, he ought to be back before this. It's a quarter to two."

"He may have gone off to lunch with the Hewett's," Derek offered. "He did once before."

"Yes, and I made him promise he would never do it again without letting us know."

"All right, Mum, he isn't dead," Keatings grumbled, with all an elder son's impatient criticism of his mother.

And again the subject lapsed, not to be revived during the meal. But in the moment of general dispersal one tidy and unoccupied place on a disorganized table stared up at Mrs. O'Grogan and prompted her to call after her receding husband :

"What can have happened to that boy ? Ought we to inquire at the school, do you think ?"

"What? Tony?" said her husband, as if he now, for the first time, realized that a child was absent, and which one it was. "Oh, well, he'll turn up, I expect. He's probably disobeyed you and gone out to lunch."

"There can't have been an accident, I suppose?"

"Gracious no! Gracious no! Tony can look after himself. If there were anything wrong we'd have been informed before this."

"He's only eleven."

And in those words from the tall, thin, tired mother was heard the woman that had once been, and the woman that might have been.

That was lunch. Tea, being the direct descendant of Nursery Tea, was always spread on a large white cloth in the breakfast-room. And Dr. O'Grogan, business permitting, liked to come into it and chaff his children, as once he had chaffed and diverted his babies. This afternoon he was turning his verbal pea-shooter on Peggy, while Keatings and Joyce, the only others who had so far arrived, gave occasional flank support, and the mother listened—or didn't listen.

"What a pity. What a pity!" he deplored as he scrutinized her. "To miss beauty by so little, but to miss it so surely! But there you are, Peggy dear; a miss is as good as a mile. It's your mouth that does it——"

"It *is* awful, isn't it?" agreed Keatings.

"Good eyes, good nose, not at all a bad little chin, but dear, dear! a mouth like a—like a—well, honestly, I don't know what it's like——"

"It's like nothing on earth," suggested Joyce.

"It's out of all proportion: too wide, too full——"

"And it's always so beastly moist," added Keatings.

"Yes, I've noticed *that*, when she's kind enough to kiss her father. And the trouble is, I see no signs of it's getting better, Peggy. I always hoped that as you got older, you'd grow up to it, as it were, and it'd be less conspicuous. But here you are, seven already, aren't you?"

"Thirteen," corrected Peggy, with her mouth full.

"Thirteen? Holy Moses, that makes the situation more desperate than ever! Every morning when I come down to breakfast I give it a glance, in the hope that there may have been some improvement overnight, but——" Dr. O'Grogan lifted a despairing hand from the table-cloth and let

it collapse again—"it's always there, just the same, *just* the same. . . ."

"Oh, well, never mind," Peggy retorted. "It eats."

"Crikey, yes!" emphasized Keatings.

"And it talks nine hundred to the dozen, when it gets going," said Joyce. "My hat, you should see it going at full speed."

"And I've heard—I've *heard*," continued Dr. O'Grogan, a thought mysteriously, "that when it loses its temper and vilifies its enemies, it—I hardly like to say the word—it is inclined to *spit* a little."

"Quite right!" Keatings endorsed, cheerfully.

"Well, one must resign oneself to it, I suppose. I should have liked a pretty younger daughter (the elder having been such a failure) and should have grown fond of her; but as it is, I shall do my duty by her—feed her and educate her, and all that. I shan't throw her out. But, Peggy, you'd better resign yourself to a life of good works, or art, or something——"

"Why?" demanded Peggy.

"Why, because—— Well, I *mean* to *say*—I *mean* to *say*——"

"Exactly!" nodded Keatings, taking the point at once.

"Mean to say what, Daddy?" Peggy persisted.

"I mean, you can't expect that any handsome young blade is ever going to invite you to—No, no; no, no. Not with a mouth like——"

At that moment Derek entered, preceded by a noticeable scent of peppermint, for he was dissolving a bull's-eye. His lateness was deliberate—so deliberate that he had delayed in the road till sure that all the others were seated. He was in the triumphant and glowing condition of possessing exclusively a sensational news item, and had been rehearsing all the way home the nonchalant words and the unruffled manner that must grace its publication. It would be a striking performance, and like other stars he desired a full house. Finding a full house now, he walked to his place, sat down, helped himself to some bread and butter, and asked:

"I suppose you've heard about Tony?"

"No!" exclaimed his mother. "What about him? Has anything happened?"

Derek drew the jam dish towards him.

"He's been caught bullying, and been whacked by the Headmaster; and now all the boys are only waiting to catch him to

give him a ragging. But he didn't turn up at Colet Court this afternoon. Seem's he's a coward as well as a bully."

The effect was all that Derek had pictured: his mother stared, his brother and sisters stared, and his father burst out:

"Good Lord! I—I don't believe it."

"Nor do I," said Keatings. "Tony's a piffling little idiot, of course, but he's not a bully. At least, I never supposed so."

"Of course he isn't!" echoed Joyce, who looked frightened.

"All right," conceded Derek, pursuing his business with the bread and jam. "I'm a liar then."

"Certainly," said Keatings.

"Good!" shrugged Derek. "Now we all know where we are."

"Yes, we know that you're not only a liar but a sneak. You enjoy sneaking on your brother."

"Oh, then you believe he did it, since you say I'm sneaking!" triumphed Derek. "But I'm not sneaking. I wouldn't breathe a word of it to anyone else, but this was something the Family should know—surely. Our name stood pretty high at Colet Court till this happened. Now I imagine it's mud."

"Don't be a pompous idiot! *You* did a lot to make it illustrious, didn't you?"

"Be quiet, Keatings," commanded his father. "Derek, tell us what you've heard."

"I've met at least a dozen Paulines this afternoon whose kiddy brothers are at Colet Court, and they've been telling me all about it. It's a nice thing to have thrown at you at every turn. One sidey ass came up and said, 'So you've a bully in your family, O'Grogan.' I asked what the dickens he was gassing about, and he told me that Tony had been bullying a new boy called Wavers and cracked his nut against a wall. I went over to Colet Court and had a look at the kid, and his head's all bound up like a wounded soldier and stinks like a hospital ward. He's absolutely the star exhibit over there just now; you can't get near him for the crowds. But they made way for me as I was Tony's brother. I said what I could in the way of apology. I said that if there was anything any of us could do to make amends, we'd certainly do it; and I hope I've undone some of the harm. The kid doesn't look more than seven years old, and he's as pale as death."

"And did he sneak on Tony?" demanded Keatings.

"No, old James caught him red-handed, and Tony went to the Headmaster's this morning and had no end of a whacking. Since when he's not been seen or heard of."

"*What!*" cried his mother.

"I don't believe a word of it!" said Joyce. "Tony isn't a bully."

"Well, why has he run away?"

"*Run away!*" cried his mother.

"Yes, I suppose that's what's happened."

Dr. O'Grogan pushed back his chair.

"This is all true, is it, Derek?"

"Honour bright."

"Then I go and see the Headmaster at once."

"And should Keatings and I and Joyce make up a search party?"

Derek had been looking forward to this suggestion.

"Oh, yes!" Joyce endorsed, forgetting dismay in excitement.

"Oh, do let's."

"You can do what you can to help, certainly."

"Come on, Keatings! Come on, Peggy."

And Keatings rose too, concealing a very real enthusiasm under the words, "Yes, we'd better do something pretty quick. Come on; we'll work out a plan of campaign."

"Oh, my Tony!" cried Mrs. O'Grogan suddenly. "Ernest, you don't believe any of it, do you? And you don't believe that he has run away?"

"No, no, no, no," he impatiently soothed. "He's probably shy of coming home. . . . Or if he has, we can recover him in no time, these days."

When Tony left the Headmaster's study he rambled out into Hammersmith Road, with a mind stunned from consecutive thought. No plan spread itself before him, except a dull certainty that he would not go home, and would not return to school that afternoon. How could he go home and face his family, some of whom would infallibly hear the tale from the newsmongers before the day darkened; how could he enter his father's church next Sunday morning; how could he ever enter the playground of Colet Court again and meet the gaping

of three hundred boys. He did not see how he could do any of these things—or how he could not. So he just walked on.

That the whole school had heard about Wavers he knew from the throngs who had been catechizing the wounded hero in the playground; and that the whole school must soon hear of his flogging he knew from fate's last merciless blow: as he had come through the Headmaster's door, he had seen a boy standing in the passage with an ear most obviously given to the stimulating sounds within and an eye waiting for a glimpse of the victim. This eye had followed him as he escaped it hurriedly, running to find his cap.

In his present witless and uncaptained drift, he kept naturally to the main road, walking on and on, but rather slowly, up Hammersmith Road and Kensington Road, with the current of the pedestrians and the traffic, and catching a depression from the long terraces of smoke-greied houses, whose few London trees were already dark and autumnal in June. On and on, past Kensington High Street and over the huddled corner of St. Mary Abbot's, till the blocks of shops on his left hand abruptly stopped, presenting a side like a cliff-face to the sea of foliage which was Kensington Gardens. The tall, immobile tree-trunks and the serene grass drew him as a forest might draw a hermit to his healing. He wandered up the Broad Walk, glancing over the railings at the ragged sleepers beneath the trees or at the dogs gambolling over the turf, and remembering how, in his childish days, every hummock crowned with elms had been a mountain screening mystery and every plantation of shrubs had hidden a fairy wood. He reached the Round Pond where, for a while, he stood in listless contemplation of the children sailing their toy yachts. And his dreaming smudged the scene with a glimmering haze.

Waking from this half-coma, he strolled round and round the pond, sometimes picking up a pebble from the gravel and examining it before losing interest and tossing it away. The population round the pond was diminishing: the nurse-maids were calling to their children, the big boys were drawing out their ships, and the old gentlemen on the green chairs were struggling to their feet; it must be one o'clock, when Lunch called all London indoors. Now he was almost alone; the half-heard voices and laughter that had come through the air were withdrawn to their happinesses at home; in their stead came the fluting of birds, the breath of the breeze among the leaves,

the fluster of a duck on the water, and the deep diapason of the traffic on the High Street.

He turned away and walked along a wide path between carpets of flowers; and the flowers troubled him, because he remembered that only the undishonoured could enjoy their loveliness. He crossed into Hyde Park, and feeling a weariness in his limbs, sat on a seat and gazed at the red and green buses as, behind the railings, they dazzled along to Knightsbridge. The only people on the seats were the sleeping tramps, and he suddenly felt a kinship with them and saw a rest and security in the vagabond life, when you plodded on and on, down the hedged roads, with no possessions to give you anxious care, and no name to be disgraced. He shivered; not with the cold, for it was a perfect summer day, but with a quick, sharp, diaphoretic memory of his disaster; and the shiver made him rise and move towards the footwalk beside Rotten Row. A few riders were in the Row now: weil-tailored, top-hatted men astride, and neat-habited, bowler-crowned women side-saddle, on their shining horses. Derek was always talking about blood-horses, and Tony, without understanding what the term meant, wondered if these were blood-horses. They and their riders, like the flowers in the carpet gardens, hurt him: surely this was life at its happiest, and such happiness was possible only to the undisgraced. He sat and watched them; and something of the beauty of women and of spirited horses and of all graceful movement; something of the beauty of happiness and of social fellowship showed itself to him this day earlier than it would have done had he never set it against the dark background of an exile's thoughts.

Unaware that he had sighed he wandered on, till he came to the park's end and the Achilles statue, round which he walked in dull examination. He turned out at the gates and seeing the equestrian statue of the Duke of Wellington, in the midst of the diverging traffic, crossed the road to make a study of that too. Never a boy of eleven but has dreamed of statues in his honour, and certainly not Tony, who had heard his gifts so loudly trumpeted of late; he shrank again as he bethought himself that he had thrown this fine hope for ever away. Oh, everything had the same stab for him. He would like to die, but death had it too. The story would remain behind; he could not take it with him into death. It was written in history for all eternity.

On up Piccadilly, where the traffic from Hammersmith blent

with lordlier strains, the red and green omnibuses mixing with victorias and landaus and broughams. One of these broughams turned many heads, because it was electrically driven and whispered along without horses, its cockaded coachman on the box steering it with a tiller. One or two of the new motor cars attracted attention too, but they were nothing like so fine as the electric brougham—high ungainly traps with a chunking coal-scuttle thing in front, or a box of works behind. There were clocks in the shops and Tony wondered that minutes could pass so slowly. A quarter-past two at the last shop, and now only twenty-past! In Piccadilly Circus it was half-past. School had begun at Colet Court, and what was happening there now? They must have learned that he was absent; did they suspect that he was staying away without permission? "Playing truant;" would that mean another caning for him, if ever he went back? But how could he go back? He did not see how he could, or how he could not—but just walked on. He came to a German band, six musicians with wind instruments playing patriotic war tunes; and the words of "The Absent-Minded Beggar" fitted themselves in his head to the music, and he walked on listlessly humming:

"Cook's son, Duke's son, son of a hundred kings . . ."

Appetite did not visit him, but only thirst; and he drank more than once from the public fountains, though he had always been forbidden to do so. But what did it matter if they were full of disease germs? Disease meant death, and that was the least of all the evils. Weariness registered in his limbs, but not seriously; it is easy to walk when you are miserable.

Much of London did Tony see that day, and a thousand of its phases; he saw a fire-engine being galloped along by its magnificent horses—blood-horses these, if any!—and heard its firemen clearing a channel through the middle of the traffic with their "Hi! Hi! Hi! Hi! Hi!" he saw what always stirred him curiously—a Black Maria hastening to the prison with the policeman on its step, and to-day he knew the souls of the captives within; he watched the scavenger-boys, in their scarlet coats and peaked caps, scraping up the horse-droppings under the very noses of the horses, and he envied them as happier than he; he watched the bare-foot children dancing round a barrel-organ as it played the eternal war-tunes, "Good-bye, Dolly, I must leave you, For I can no longer stay"; in the

Mile End Road he watched a contortionist performing on a mat in the gutter, and wondered what his home-life was like; at the corner of Stratford High Street he heard the beating of a drum and the whistle of pan-pipes, and, walking towards the noise, joined an audience of ragged children who were gaping up at a Punch and Judy show; he stared unsmiling while Mr. Punch sat on the shelf of his high-pitched theatre, and cracked the beadle on the head, shrieking at every blow in his raucous falsetto, "Oh, dear!" . . . "Oh, dear! . . . Oh, dear! . . . Oh, dear! . . . Oh, dear!" And when the showman put his theatre on a barrow and wheeled it away, followed by a herd of children, Tony lifted his eyebrows and walked on.

He was in the Essex outskirts, among trees and fields again, when the dusk of the coming night drew about him. With it came bewilderment; and he stood still in the empty road—a child without a will—a brain beaten. Should he go forward or backward? What was going to happen now? Something would happen sooner or later; it was known to God who could see the future, but it was not in Tony to do anything to shape it. Going backward was more painful than going forward, so towards what destiny had written, he walked on.

Keatings' search parties returned in time for a late supper with nothing achieved except large appetites and talkative tongues, and minds lustrous with alarm and excitement. They had made judicious inquiries at the homes of Tony's friends; they had stood at the gates of Colet Court and "reconstructed the crime;" and they had even, on a bright inspiration of Joyce's, "combed out" Kensington Gardens. And now they returned, eager to publish their complete, despairing defeat.

"It's a bad business," said Derek, as he sat down to supper.

"And the worst part is," Keatings told his mother, "that it's all true. Tony *has* been bullying the kid."

"Yes, and when he turns up," added Derek, "we shall have to do something about it. We can't have this sort of thing in the Family."

"I can't believe it yet," Joyce declared. "But if it's true, I shan't be able to speak to him. I simply *couldn't*."

"Unfortunately it *is* true," Keatings bemoaned.

"Of course it is," Derek corroborated, who now felt justified of men. "But I'll lay it won't happen again. Is Father back, Mother?"

"No, he came back in a cab from Colet Court and when he heard that Tony was still missing, he went off again. We've not seen or heard anything of him since that."

"Good Lord!" exclaimed Keatings. "Don't say *he's* lost now."

Peggy was out of the conversation. Her imagination had long been giving her a vivid sense of Tony's pangs, and she was listening with astonishment to these unimaginative hints of further punishment for the runaway. Did her brothers lack some vision that was easy to her? Did Joyce? Surely—surely it was daylight clear that if Tony had already had one flogging and was now in such misery that he had run away, there was nothing but cruelty in adding to his punishment. Why couldn't they see it as plainly as she could? Derek—you wouldn't expect *him* to see it; but Keatings and Joyce—why were they so blind?

In the absence of their father, Keatings, as usual, assumed command.

"Joyce and I will sit up all night, if necessary. But Derek and Peggy'll jolly well go to bed. The servants can go to bed too. Too many cooks spoil the broth," said he, and wondered whether this concluding citation were wholly felicitous.

Derek protested vigorously, as well he might, for he felt that the whole mystery was his peculiar property. But he went to bed a few inches in front of Keatings' following boot.

Peggy, who slept in the same room as Joyce, thus lay alone. Often she looked at the blue night behind the lace-work of the holland blind, and thought of Tony out there in the darkness alone; and as her mind created his pangs with increasing sharpness, her heart did sickly jumps and slips under her small, maturing breast. And her vision, playing freely now, gave her a sight of the difference between herself and Keatings and Joyce; it was not that they had less imagination than she, but that they were so lost in imagining themselves the ministers and instruments of justice that they had no time to project themselves into the victim's mind, whereas she had leapt there instantly.

Tony was in disgrace for having bullied a little boy; he had been whipped, and his schoolfellows were waiting to vent their contempt in persecution, and from this humiliation—not

from the mere threat of pain, as that idiot Derek supposed—Tony had run! Two problems puzzled her head now. One, that this idea of Tony being whipped should be so stimulating; wasn't that a rather awful wickedness in her? And the other, that if *she* had been in disgrace and persecuted, she would not have run from it but would almost have enjoyed it. If, for example, she had been in disgrace with Miss Gibbon—a mistress at Cottenham whom she was disposed to worship—and if Miss Gibbon had severely punished her, she would have—yes, there was no doubt of it—she would have found it rather thrilling. Her body, as she conceived of such punishment now, endorsed the idea with a pleasant tremor.

Oh, poor Tony! what was he doing? Bed is ever a rich soil, and darkness the right light, for the rearing of black fantasies, and she saw her brother leaping into the Serpentine . . . jumping over London Bridge. . . laying his head on the rails as the express thundered up. So perfect was her identification with him that she gasped as the water closed over her head, or the train approached. "O God, make him not do that. . . ."

"O God. . . ." Of course, she must pray hard for Tony, and keep on praying, like the Importunate Widow, or like—like—what was this old memory struggling to the surface? A Sunday afternoon in church, and the winter dusk creeping over the heads of six hundred children, and Mr. Crabb beaming from his pulpit. . . . Like Mrs. Mark and Rhoda, who prayed for Peter when he was in prison awaiting death, and, even as they prayed, heard his footsteps approaching and his knock at their door. If she prayed now for Tony, hour after hour, with tireless perseverance and unshakeable faith, she would sooner or later hear his footsteps echoing up St. Austin's Road. She saw the long road, abandoned by everybody to the occupying starlight; its paraded houses staring at each other from their blinded windows, its gas lamps dotting a zig-zag line from pavement to pavement. And then she saw a figure turn out of Kensington Road, and walk up the pavement, till its steps became audible: *pat, pat, pat, pat, pat, pat*. . . . By persistent prayer she would bring Tony round the corner like that. Mrs. Mark and Rhoda had done it with Peter. But—

Oh, how often she had turned to God, offering him promises of amendment in exchange for some signal favour, and after no more than a few days of holiness, abandoned its pressures and

strains with extraordinary relief! So what was the use of praying now? Prayers, as she had heard in her father's church a hundred times, were of no avail unless associated with these promises of amendment; and in common fairness what could she do but refuse to sign such a blank cheque on her credit when she knew it would never be honoured!

From her earliest days Peggy had seen the beauty of holiness, and loved it. The characters who appealed to her in her books were those who went about on works of mercy, binding up the wounds of the broken, visiting those condemned to death, and receiving illegitimate mothers into their houses. Peggy—though she found it difficult to put a penny of her pocket money in the alms-plate, and loathed having to say her prayers at night, and could not stop stealing biscuits off the sideboard, and fibbed at school with heart-breaking aplomb, and always enjoyed saying punishing things to her brothers—Peggy, despite all this, in her dreams of the future, saw herself as a nun with a serene face framed in a wimple and a crucifix dangling on her breast—or a sister with a basket of comforts under her arm—or a nurse with a lamp in her hand. A sister! It was a lovely word; she would like to be a sister to the whole world, but one who accounted as her favourite brothers the bedraggled, the old, the wicked, the smelly, the spurned. Always she would be walking among them with her basket, or her lamp. Always she would be knocking at their doors with new gifts; and in their profoundest griefs she would even kiss their grimy and revolting brows. One of her greatest ambitions in life was to have kissed a leper.

And now with all her heart she wanted to pray for Tony, but what was the use? God could see right into the back of her head, and was probably at this moment resting His eyes on her secret certainty that she would backslide into rebellion. But perhaps he would listen to a prayer for Tony, if offered simply for his sake.

"O God, make it all right for Tony, and bring him safely home, not for my sake who am but dust and ashes, but for his, Amen."

Ten, twenty, fifty times, she repeated it, but her doubts of it grew with repetition. Was she so poor a sister that she could not make the effort to be good, even though her brother's safety depended on it? Pausing, she listened for footsteps in the street. Not a sound came through the open window and

past the unstirring blind. *Could* she make the promise to try again? No, not with intent to keep it, and God was not mocked. She could promise to *try* to try again; that was all.

"O God, I promise to *try*, but I will not deceive Thee by pretending to think it will come off; nevertheless, with Thee all things are possible. I pray Thee, accept my prayer that all may come right with Tony; forgive him his iniquities and bring him safe home, Amen."

This twenty times, counted on her fingers.

Any footsteps in the street yet? No, only the night silence. Perhaps Importunacy was not reached till you had said it a hundred times. She said it eighty times more, and the effect was almost to send her to sleep.

In common with the ascetics of all ages Peggy held the curious idea that prayers uttered in a comfortable position must be less effective than those uttered in acute discomfort. And it was warm and comfortable in bed. Let her get out and kneel in the cold. Let her say her prayer fifty times by the bed's side, till she felt the cold chilling her body. She leapt out for the exercise, quite as pleased and delighted with the game as were Keatings and Joyce and Derek when they started off as a search-party. Fifty times at the bed's side she said her prayer, never once sitting back for the support of her heels, or collapsing forward into the soft invitation of the counterpane. And she was most abominably cold when she finished, and not a little stiff in the knees; which satisfied her so much that she added ten more repetitions, and, rising, felt really hopeful. She went to the window to look out, not expecting immediate results, but just in case a miracle might be happening. The road stretched emptily away.

Still, she felt strangely confident now, and climbed back into bed. Since Tony would be back soon, she dropped into the pleasanter occupation of considering how she would greet him. That all the others were against him was a cruel fact, but she was not insensible to the fine ebon background this hostility would provide for her gentle pity; nor, though she would have repudiated this thought, was she over eager that it should be at once removed: she wanted to be able to contrast against it her love and forgiveness—to be able to visit his prison bedroom and say with full effect something like: "*I do not condemn thee; go and sin no more.*" And as he lay on his guilty couch she would put an arm around his shoulders and draw him

close. It would be the nearest she could get, for the present, to kissing a leper.

The picture proved so attractive that she fell to praying again for the return of Tony. The prayer became a set form; and as her familiarity with the words increased, her repetitions, leaving her conscious control behind, acquired a velocity that passed belief and a rhythm that was one with the rhythm of the universe.

Stay!—oh, too wonderful!—was there not the sound of a horse in the road? Yes! *clapper-clut, clapper-clut, clapper-clut*—a cab was coming. Oh, silly that she had been! of *course* Tony would return in a four-wheeler with his father; and here he was! It was a little inartistic, perhaps, that the footsteps which were to resemble Peter's should be the footsteps of a cab-horse, but it was the same in essence; God had granted her prayer as he had granted Rhoda's; in his unconquerable forgiveness he had once again turned his face from her sins. But wait! if it wasn't to stop at their door? Her fingers flew to her lips in a spasm of doubt—but it *was* stopping. Yes, it was they. Gratitude to God and conditional promises poured from her till they acquired the velocity and rhythm of her previous petitions. There was a bustling in the hall, as Mother and Keatings and Joyce hurried to the door. And Tony's voice. Oh, pray God that they didn't forgive him before *she* could!

After the voices had dwindled behind the door of the breakfast-room, she had to wait a long time, seemingly an endless time, before they emerged again and the family climbed to their several rooms. Tony's room was on the landing below, and she heard him go in. She would count a hundred, so as to give him plenty of time for undressing, and then set forth on her sisterly visit. Reaching the hundred sooner than she expected, she decided to give him another fifty. Thereupon she got up, lit her candle, and holding it in her hand, looked out into the passage; nor at that moment did she think of her likeness to the Lady with the Lamp. The passage was dark and deserted, and she tip-toed quickly and guiltily down the stairs and knocked at her brother's door.

"Come in."

Entering, she saw that he was already in bed, huddled up in the clothes.

"Tony: I'm so glad you're back. I thought you would

like to know there's somebody siding with you. I'm siding with you through thick and thin."

"I'm all right," Tony muttered, mixing a sad fatalism with a proud independence.

He was blinking his eyes at the candle, so she laid it on the washstand, before sitting on his bed and putting her arm around his shoulder. That done, she sank—and sank with a sinker's alarm and gathering despair—into a horrid and embarrassing speechlessness. Tony said nothing, and even betrayed his discomfort at the position of her arm; and Peggy could not think of a single possible sentence. She had fondled the idea of strengthening him with a verse of poetry that had often garnished her father's sermons:

"Beware of desperate deeds;
The darkest day
(Live till to-morrow)
Will have passed away;"

but all courage for uttering it had finally evaporated. So they both stayed awkwardly there, Peggy holding an embarrassment (Tony) in her arms, and Tony in the grasp of one.

"Tony: you're not awfully unhappy, are you?" she essayed at last.

"No," said he. "Not particularly."

And then a happier idea seized her, of something much easier to do than to speak consolation and strength.

"Tony: would you like me to come into your bed and sleep with you? I will if it'd be any comfort to you."

"No, thanks," said Tony.

"Well. . . ." These sinners were always a little sullen, and she refused to sigh about it. "Well, Tony: I'll leave you now. Good night."

"Good night."

She had not even the courage to kiss him now. Holding her disappointment at bay, she took up her candle, gave him a doctor's bedside smile, and on her bare feet drifted from the room, soundlessly as a child's ghost.

Though Peggy's will had failed to produce a recitation of

"The darkest day
(Live till to-morrow)
Will have passed away,"

it remains the aptest comment on Tony's twelve black hours. The entanglement and the knots in his life which had filled those hours with bewilderment simplified themselves in a manner too easy, one might say, to be consistent with the dignity of the preceding pain. It had been easy for Dr. O'Grogan, once he had accepted the conviction that he must use the police, to find Tony. About ten o'clock that night, a Romford policeman had dropped his eyes on the silver Maltese cross of a Colet Court cap, and, under cover of an amicable smile, charged its wearer with being Antony O'Grogan. And Tony, too brain-sick and indifferent to meet this with anything but the truth, answered simply, "Yes."

"You're lost, ain't yer?" inquired the policeman.

"I suppose so," said Tony.

"Sort of run away, eh? Well, I should come back 'ome, if I was you. You have a better time at 'ome, all said and done, than you do at sea. At sea, you know, they string you up to the mast and wollop your bare back with a rope's end, till they have the skin off yer. You don't want none of that. It's no life for a gen'l'man, relly—not when you can have bacon and eggs every morning for your breakfast at 'ome. Yes, you come along, sonny, and let's phone to your pa. I'll lay he don't give you a hiding, now he's found you again. They never do, bless yer heart. We see a lot of runaway nippers in our time, and their pa's and ma's, after threatening to strap 'em no end, are all over 'em, once they get 'em back. Kissin' 'em and cuddlin' 'em as if they were two-year-olds. So don't you worry about that. You come along o' me, and we'll give you your tea."

Tony, for want of any other solution, was now walking along by the policeman's side, who applied himself to sustaining their first cordial association by a prop of friendly chatter.

"My missus lives along of the station, and she'll look after you properly, till I come off my beat myself, which'll be in half no-time now, when I'll come and have a crack with you too. Yes, there was one nipper we had: his pa had come 'ome rather the worse for his drink, and was all for taking a strap to him, just—as far as I could make out—to keep his eye in and pass away the time; and the nipper—'e done a guy like a good 'un through the scullery window, while his pa was undoing his belt in the kitchen; and when the kid didn't come 'ome for hours and hours, the father come rolling round to us and

says we've got to find 'im, or what was taxes for? 'But don't you do the punishin' of him,' he says; 'you leave that to me,' he says. 'I'll learn 'im to run away from a good 'ome.' And when we pointed out that runnin' away wasn't an indictable offence, he says, 'Oh, *isn't* it? It *is* at No. 7 Barford Buildings'—which was where he lived—'I'll indict the seat of 'is pants for 'im, so that 'e won't run away again in a 'urry and make a police matter of it. Gratitude!' he says, 'Gratitude—they don't know what it means.' And just then, while he was goin' on like that, there was a call for the ambulance, and he saw the stretcher being wheeled out of the door. 'Christ!' he says—I beg yer pardon, sonny, but that was what he actually said—'Christ!' he says. 'Is that for our Paul?' We knew it wasn't, but we didn't let on. 'Our Paul ain't run over, is 'e?' he says. 'That ain't for our little Paul, is it?' I seldom see a man as pale as 'e was then. Well, the long and the short of it is 'e was there for hours bletherin' about 'his bairn' and reckonin' 'e'd always bin a bit on the rough side with him, and cursin' the pubs as the cause of it all and wantin' to have them all shut up by the law of the land, and then, all of a sudden, we produced the nipper, and you should 'a just seen 'im then. God's truth! he was all over 'im like a woman, and carried 'im off 'ome on his shoulder. However, I expect your pa's a different sort to that."

They were now at the station, which was quite a homely red-brick building, behind a hedge of euonymus. Its front had big official doors opening on to an asphalted drive, but its western wing showed curtained windows looking on to runner-beans and cabbages and sweet-peas and evidently held the quarters of the married policemen. Into a sitting-room, as small as the living-room of the Freshwater cottage, but housing twice as much furniture and bric-à-brac, most of which seemed to be either draped in lace or enclosed under glass, Tony was shown, and into the smiling welcome of a ruddy, full-bosomed woman. They gave him tea in a white cup ringed with gold; and as he drank it, though bruised from thinking and soft with sleep, he found himself wondering that the stately policemen of London should have a cottage life at home so little different from that of Andrews, the Freshwater fisherman, and that the head and face of his present rescuer, now he had come in and doffed his helmet, should seem so small.

An hour or so, and the wheels of a cab halted outside and

his father, his black Inverness cape flying open, came into the little room, spreading his hands towards Tony, in a pantomime of surprise and delight at this strange meeting.

"Well, Tony, God bless my soul! fancy seeing you again! Now isn't this jolly?" He put an arm round his shoulder and drew him rather lovingly against his side, looking the while at the policeman. "And this good friend of yours, you owe him very considerable gratitude, don't you? You'd like to make him a present, I expect. . . . Trouble at school," he explained to the policeman, while he fumbled at the little sovereign-case in his waistcoat pocket; and Tony guessed that he had mentioned this, that no shadow might fall on his own reputation. He put something into the palm of the policeman. "That's but a poor expression of our gratitude, but it carries a full heart with it—a very full heart——"

"That's all right; that's nothing; don't you worry about that, sir," demurred the policeman, but putting the gift in his trouser pocket none the less. "Pleased to 'a bin a bit of service to you."

"A very big bit of service indeed. However——" he quickly changed the subject; patting Tony's arm as he held him, he laughed out, "Got five of these young animals at home, and they seem like fifty. You wouldn't think you'd notice one more or less, but there you are! you do. The disappearance of one leaves quite a draught; and this knave here was rather my Benjamin, you see—he and his sister."

Altogether Dr. O'Grogan stood in that little room, a lofty monument of gratitude and jocosity; and what with the huge policeman standing opposite him, and his large wife standing on one side with her arms in her apron, and Tony standing squeezed into his father's Inverness cape, it was difficult to recall afterwards on what part of the floor they could have been assembled. "Yes, five of them, and none of them earning their keep. I suppose you've got some, too, constable, to make your life a burden and a reproach."

"Three," answered the policeman. "Leastways, three alive; but they're all off me hands now. The eldest of all we've just lost, in South Africa there." He cocked his big thumb over his shoulder, as if South Africa were in the next room.

"Really? Really?" Dr. O'Grogan queried, in his most sympathetic voice. "That's dreadfully sad."

"Can't be helped, sir. But, as you say, it's a sad business to bring 'em up and educate 'em, just for them to be knocked out at the very moment when they ought to put it all to some use. I'm glad your nippers ain't old enough to go; and I don't expect, after this business, we shall have another war in a hurry. Not in their time, let us hope."

At home, and at Colet Court, everything was simplified by the slight fever which Tony's temperature revealed in the morning. The mountains went down before this sickness. At the Vicarage the children, after sitting by his bed, expressed themselves as surprised and delighted that he could make such a good case for himself. And at Colet Court, though his absence gave currency to a rumour that he had been expelled, or, alternatively, that his pater had given him such a flogging that he was likely to be confined to bed for weeks, Wavers's white bandage came down; with the odd result that the lynch-law which had been smouldering in wait for Tony's return, simply expired, for want of this important fuel. Moreover, Derek threw some excellent sand on it. Having heard these disgraceful rumours, he felt that the honour of the Family demanded a personal visit from himself to some of his friends who were still at Colet Court; and to these powerful people he averred that, now he had heard his kiddy brother's tale, he didn't feel at all sure that Wavers wasn't a filthy little sneak and deserved all he got. And he'd thank them, he said, to publish this fact broadcast, so as to make it all right for Tony when he would be back at school. With the utmost readiness they engaged to do so. And Derek returned in dignified triumph to his brother's bedside, and quietly explained, "It'll be all right at Colet Court, kid. I've seen to it that you shan't be molested when you go back."

Tony was nervous the morning he went back, but a few hours at school showed him that the boys, so were their heads by now flooded with new interests, had consigned their thoughts on the Wavers episode into the dustbin that had received the white bandage. His appearance did not draw a single sidelong glance.

And then, almost as soon as he was comfortably resettled at school, they were all at Freshwater, under holiday skies, canoeing into the caves at high water; climbing Afton Down to take tea at Compton Farm; chaffing and being chaffed by

Andrews, the boatman, as they rocked in his boat a mile from shore ; bathing from Rogers's sandy machines ; or walking out of an afternoon, Peggy and Tony, to Alum Bay to paint the blue bay at the hour when its Needle Rocks went marching towards the western sun.

These laboured pictures—begun for a competition inaugurated by the *Western Wight Chronicle*—lifted Alum Bay this summer into a place of almost greater appeal than Freshwater Bay itself.

Day after day, in August's close, Peggy and Tony, with folding three-legged stools under their arms and satchels on their backs, trudged to Alum Bay along the turf road that rolls at the foot of the Downs, between the chalk-pits and the hedge. They came to know every yard of that hedge, and to think of it as of no other hedge in England ; they greeted each part of its tangled make-up as a shepherd his individual sheep—its elder and hawthorn and ash, its hemp-agrimony and woody nightshade, and its signal points of cuckoo pint, made of berries red as a fire-engine. This hedge and the turf road were a tramway guiding them straight to the chine, whose steps dipped down to the beach of Alum Bay. And a figure haunted the road, either treading its tussocky turf or walking above it on the sky-line of the Downs—the figure of Captain Alum.

Captain Alum was the famous character of Western Wight in those days : a little stumpy old man, with a waving black beard resting on his red jersey and waving black hair touching the shoulders of his blue jacket or blowing in the hill-side wind. He tramped the turf, disturbing the butterflies and the bees and the thistledown, with a stick over his shoulder and a bundle on its end, exactly like the traditional luggage of Dick Whittington ; but sometimes the likeness was marred by a pair of disreputable old boots slung abaft the bundle ; this was when Captain Alum, so fine a soul was he, liked to feel with his bare feet the soft, moist, springy turf and praise the God who gave it. His jersey was red because he had once, in his enthusiasm for the Dear Lord, enlisted in the ranks of the Salvation Army ; but they, it seemed, had quickly cashiered him from the service, and Captain Alum had forgiven them their blindness, and unpicked the words " Salvation Army " from his jersey, and removed the ribbon from his peaked cap, and worn both in his office as a private merryman of God.

" He must have been pretty bad, if the Salvation Army

wouldn't have him," the coachman with the cyst over his eye used to say to the children when, on their arrival at Yarmouth, they asked first after Captain Alum. "Yes, he's still going strong. The other day, just before my coach started from Freshwater Gate, and the people were crowding on it more than it'll rightly hold, he stood a little distance off and sang something about 'Yes, there's room, yes, there's room, room in that far-off beautiful land,' or some gammon like that. Sing! there's no mistaking he can sing. And when the horses got going, he broke into 'Home, Sweet Home,' and the passengers were so moved, what with their holiday being over and all, that they threw out pennies and sixpences, and the kiddies waved to him till we was out of sight. The last I saw of him he seemed to be blessing us. Well he might! there was three-and-a-tanner on the road if there was a penny. 'Sno good having him moved on, because he goes so quietly, putting on his hat and turning away with a sigh, that the people run after him with tears in their eyes and give him money."

All over the island tramped Captain Alum, with his bundle and his boots and his apostolic hair waving in the wind, singing in the loveliest tenor voice ever heard on those hills :

"When upon Life's billows you are tempest-tossed,
When you are discouraged, thinking all is lost,
Count your many blessings, count them one by one,
And it will surprise you what the Lord has done ;"

or, if the wind beat about him and the sea roared beneath the cliffs :

"Peace, perfect peace, with sorrows surging round ;
On Jesu's bosom nought but calm is found."

Newbarn and Brading Down and Culver Down and the hills above Ventnor and Blackgang had heard his song, and the people at their feet had contributed their coppers and their crusts to his maintenance, but it was ever to Alum Bay, where the Needles carried the Island to its furthestmost western reach, that he harked back at last. There the wind blew north and south of him, and the sun set in his face, and he sang it to its rest, while the soldiers from the battery stood at their doors to listen :

"The day Thou gavest, Lord, is ended,
The darkness falls at Thy behest . . ."

Sometimes there were no soldiers in the hill-top battery, or children down on the distant beach, to study his figure dark against the sky and catch the falling of his voice, and then he sang it alone ; for he was like all great artists, and, while much preferring an audience and a fee, was ever ready, did love and remuneration fail him, to create his beauty for himself alone.

One day the whole O'Grogan family was lunching in the big saloon of the Alum Bay Hotel, and he stood without the precincts and sang to the many munching visitors " of Jesus and His love ; " and at the conclusion of his testimony, visited three of the open windows with his peaked cap extended for alms before the manager could hurry out on to the terrace and bid him begone. Nothing bitterly, he turned and left the gate, and sitting in a free and public place beyond, changed his hymn to " No, never alone ; no, never alone ; He has promised never, to leave me, And He never will leave me alone ; " which so affected the hotel visitors that they went out, one by one, and gave him of their substance. Dr. O'Grogan most deliberately went out, with his table-napkin in one hand and a shilling in the other, and gave the shilling to his brother evangelist ; expounding on his return that, even if the old fellow was a scoundrel, he merited recognition as an artist who was creating for their amusement, and in the free and open air, as delightful a comic character as any Dan Leno or Herbert Campbell were creating on the boards. " All artists put their genius for effect out to market, and if he chooses to market his creations in this way, well and good ; it behoves us who have enjoyed them to pay for our entertainment. Most great humbugging scoundrels have been well worth the price they have cost the world, because they've contributed so much to the gaiety of nations ; there was Dizzy . . . and Charles Bradlaugh . . . and now there's the German Emperor." And well pleased with his aphorisms, Dr. O'Grogan attacked the pudding.

Never did Peggy and Tony set off with their folding stools and their drawing blocks but they hoped to see Captain Alum sitting under the hedge by his bundle, ready to smile on them as they passed, and to give them a " God go with you, my dears. God bless your going out and your coming in ; " or, on their homeward journey at nightfall, to hear his voice falling from the summits of Tennyson Down with the words, " Sun of my soul, Thou Saviour dear, It is not night if Thou be near," and at length to discern his figure silhouetted against the sky.

He visited them once when they were sketching. Unheard on his naked feet, he came down the chine to the shore and stood behind their rounded backs, to study the pictures shaping beneath their brushes. Peggy became aware of him first, and was straightway possessed by a violent interior giggling, which bent her face over her block, charged her cheeks with blood, sang in her nose, and finally burst through her lips, sprinkling her sea-scape with a rash of spots. Tony caught the giggle and suffered no less. But Captain Alum only fingered his silky black beard, and nodded, and blessed them in their work, saying, "May the Master guide your hand."

The southern wall of Alum Bay is a sharded cliff down which the sands and clays of a dozen formations, lie in cataracts of colour—deep purple, rich red, light yellow, and pink and white and brown; so that, in the old days, when the pier was still unbroken by the sea, and before the hotel was burned down and left for the skeleton it now is, and before Captain Alum disappeared over the hills to be heard of no more, the ships from the mainland towns used to come into the bay, bringing their crowds of visitors to gaze on a precipice with a rainbow face. The northern wall is a rounded hill, patched with gorse, overhung with purple saddle-cloths of heather, and sloping in easy steps and spurs to the beach. On an evening when the ship against the pier had taken its last passenger aboard, and Peggy and Tony, having folded their stools, were standing to watch it cast off and put to sea, and the sun was low behind the Needles, and there was assuredly no money to be made out of the gospel anywhere, Captain Alum appeared on a spur of the northern hill as suddenly as if he were the figure of an Arabian *djinn* incarnated from the dust at his feet; and he waited there, his black locks taking the wind, till the siren boomed, and the ship swung its stern, when he lifted his peaked cap high above his head, and sent his voice after the ship, singing it into the open sea :

"God be with you till we meet again ;
Keep love's banner floating o'er you,
Smite death's threatening wave before you :
God be with you till we meet again."

Great was the fascination possessed by Captain Alum for Peggy and Tony; for Peggy, perhaps, because deep down in her heart lurked the idea that it must be the loveliest thing in

the world to wander about despised and rejected and destitute, with the sky for roof and the down for pillow, and singing to such as would hear of the goodness of God ; and for Tony, because he had already glimpsed a beauty in the vagabond life, when a man takes to his own road, shaking his shoulders free of property and praise alike, and claiming the liberty of the artist to be whatever his genius calls for, whether a saint or a scoundrel.

PART II

CHAPTER I

THE SUCCESS OF THE GABRIELS

IN the O'Grogans' world there stood a most oppressive phenomenon, a perdurable fact whose shadow none might avoid or gainsay ; and it was the success of their kinsmen, the Gabriels.

Success seemed to be the Gabriels' by prescriptive right. The Venerable John Gabriel, Archdeacon of Putney, and brother-in-law to Dr. O'Grogan, was a good captain for the Gabriel phalanx, for in the intervals between his capturing of most of the ecclesiastical prizes within his reach, he had trained and equipped his four children, with much personal labour, for the capturing of as many as possible of the scholastic benefactions of the ages. The two elder were boys and the two younger girls ; and it appeared as if these four children had only to approach their school prizes and scholarships, for the valuable things to drop from their branches and roll to meet them. John and Warner Gabriel both took Winchester and New College scholarships, and Elsa and Theresa Gabriel did equally large things in their quieter feminine places. And if the Archdeacon went in front of this advancing phalanx, setting a high example of unresting work and complacent achievement, Mrs. Gabriel may be said to have come up behind somewhat hotly and breathlessly, not making any conquests of her own, but advancing under the cover of her children, flattering them with talk about their gifts, and publishing their successes, like a good liaison officer, to less successful companies in the rear.

This Mrs. Gabriel—the Aunt Adelaide who, on a far-away birthday, had presented Tony with his toy engine—was, in fact, as Tony had perceived then, a very ordinary woman, if not something of a fool ; and it was natural that she should

be secretly astonished at the cohort of young conquerors whom she had produced with the Archdeacon's aid, and should fall to descanting, rather too often and rather too liberally, on their attainments at home, their good discipline at school, and the methods that should be employed by others who desired a like result. To Mrs. O'Grogan, as the mother of an undisciplined rabble, she was especially generous with these hints and homilies; and to the O'Grogan children also, as members of that rabble. They always thought of her as coming into their drawing-room, looking very fat and fashionable in contrast with their thin and tired mother, and sitting fatly in a creaking chair to report a new success. She fingered the gold chains on her bosom as she spoke of the Archdeacon's invitation to the Royal Garden Party, or of Warner's election to the Union.

John and Warner Gabriel were of much the same age as Keatings and Joyce, but there any resemblance ceased; for Keatings and Joyce were as unsuccessful in their intercourse with school examinations as their cousins were successful. The only examination which Keatings ever met and conversed with on friendly, if undemonstrative, terms was that slim janitor which permitted him to pass from Colet Court to St. Paul's. It is not recorded that Joyce ever passed any important examination; though, had she been examined at Cottenham on the things that delighted her—dress, bicycles, an adored girl friend, one or two curates, and such divine novels as "King Solomon's Mines" and "The Silence of Dean Maitland"—she would have sent up some very lively papers indeed.

Keatings' attitude to the Gabriels' success was to accept it as unquestionable and to use it as an opportunity for some indecorous satire, and thus to turn an evil thing into a good. To him this towering success, this huge overweening Fact, was as a mighty tree-trunk into which he could shoot his arrows of humour, after he had carefully dipped them in poison. If over the dinner-table there was a request for information which no one could supply, he would offer but one remark: "Ask the Gabriels." If the conversation threatened to move towards some difficult and controversial subject, he would strive to hold it back by submitting: "Why worry? Ask the Gabriels." In fine, a debate might develop on any topic, political, religious, literary or sporting, and the atmosphere might heat with friction, but he never broke his silence

except to murmur: "Why quarrel, children? Ask the Gabriels."

From his talk, with which he was frugal as he grew older, it appeared that he had' no ambition in life for himself or for his family, except that they should one day "flatten out the Gabriels." This exception made him more appreciative of any little success of his brothers and sisters than he might otherwise have been. When Joyce did so small a thing as to earn by her appearance an honourable mention in the newspaper's report of a ball, he remarked: "Well, that's something towards flattening out the Gabriels, at any rate. Mother, take it round and show the fat lady." When Derek played scrum half for the Second XV of St. Paul's, he waited till Derek was out of hearing and then said to his mother: "It's not much, but it's something. You'd better let the Gabriels have it in the chest. Only don't let Derek know we're puffing about it; he's conceited enough already." When Peggy was chosen to impersonate "Little Em'ly" in some Dickensian tableaux at Cottenham, he commanded: "Take it round, Mummy. No one'd ever put Elsa and Theresa Gabriel into a tableau, unless it were as Mrs. Gummidge or Jane Murdstone." And when at last the Family did quite a big thing, Tony entering St. Paul's, not by shaking hands with that slim janitor, the Entrance Examination, but with that proud pass, a Junior Scholarship, Keatings was moved to exclaim: "Praise God, ye peoples! It's a priceless jar for the Gabriels. Perhaps Tony, at any rate, will do something in life that will properly flatten them out."

His satire, more than once, trespassed along the pleasant hedges of profanity. He would maintain that there could be no other explanation of the Gabriel perfections than that the Archangel himself had, on a day of long ago, accepted the favours of a mortal maid, and so founded the astonishing family. He would pronounce of the Archdeacon, when Aunt Adelaide had visited the drawing-room and left the air rumourous with his great achievements, "Children, at last a Man has appeared upon the earth. Now is Creation and all its travail justified." He called his uncle Empedocles; and when his brothers and sisters invited him to unfold the riddle, explained that Empedocles was a Sicilian philosopher who, after being the "big noise" in his parts, had suddenly decided that he was too great for this world and forthwith plunged into Etna's fire.

"And that seems to me a thoroughly sound and not un-humorous thing to do," said he; "I can't think why the Archdeacon stays amongst us. It must be terribly lonely, living in the world without one's equal anywhere."

Joyce's vindictiveness was less vocal, but harder, because less modified by humour. The blaring of the Gabriel girls' intellectual triumphs raised in her a hard, unreasoning contempt, which could only spit at their dowdiness and plainness; nor justly then, for though Elsa and Theresa lacked charm, they sat well this side of ugliness, and had much of the quiet dignity that goodness and learning give. But Joyce, in her hidden places, thought herself a far finer creature than either Elsa or Theresa. Academic success? What mattered all the academic success in the world when she knew that, if Joyce O'Grogan and Elsa and Theresa Gabriel were to go together to a dance, then Joyce would have more partners than her card could hold, while Elsa and Theresa would sit by the wall?

Derek, as usual, differed from the rest of the family in his attitude to the Gabriel noise. In the mind of Derek, notwithstanding he had announced, soon after his fifteenth birthday, that he and Tallboys Major were Agnostics, the possession of a much-paragraphed Archdeacon for an uncle seemed capable of use as an appendage to his own dignity; and he accordingly made large play with the Archdeacon's name among his fellow Paulines. So also with his cousins' tale of successes at Winchester and Oxford: they seemed excellent matter for rehearsal at school—even for enlargement.

It was in Peggy's nature to savour keenly her own loyalty to the Family, so she endorsed Keatings' idea that they must erect something soon which would equal the beetling superiority of the Gabriels; but she doubted much the righteousness of wanting to annihilate it. That was to covet other men's goods; that was to speak unkindly of those who despitefully used you. Unlike Keatings, who was ready, apparently, to steamroll the Gabriels' flat, with or without pain, so long as for ever, Peggy resolved that she must bear them no malice and must only allow herself a few private pictures of what she would do, if their overthrow *should* come to pass. Oh, if it did—if only it did—why, then she would hasten to the Gabriels with her sympathy, thus heaping the coals of fire on their heads; she would defiantly associate with Elsa and Theresa if ever they

"stooped to folly and learned too late that men betray"—which seemed unlikely, somehow; she would take her basket of comforts to John and Warner Gabriel in prison, should they ever be sent there for fraud; and she would provide for the whole family when they were thrown into poverty by the sudden death of the Archdeacon.

This vindictiveness against the Gabriels was often rebuked by Dr. O'Grogan, but only with a laughing tolerance, which suggested that it really woke an answering chord in him. After all, his brother-in-law was two years younger than he, and his congregation at Putney could not be compared, either in numbers or in fashion, with his own at Kensington; and yet the man had been made a gaitered Archdeacon in his thirties, while Dr. O'Grogan himself, though nearing fifty, had not so much as a prebendal stall in the Cathedral. And always he was hearing: "Your brother-in-law, the Archdeacon, is sure to be a bishop some day;" while of himself, as he knew very well, the people were saying: "Dr. Ernest would certainly have gone much further, if only . . . if only . . ."

For the wide-spread of that "if only . . ." he was inclined to blame his wife. She should have more dignity than to let people see her embitterment and her distrust; not easily had he forgiven her when it came to his knowledge that she had answered one of the "Ernest worshippers," who had gushed: "Oh, what a beautiful, *beautiful* sermon your husband preached this morning, Mrs. O'Grogan," with a sad: "It is easy to preach, Mrs. Paget. . . ."

Still, that "if only . . ." had probably heightened his fame and lit his figure to a picturesqueness. Just as the breath of scandal, only increased the commercial value of an actor, so the "if only . . ." that flitted from Hammersmith to Hyde Park had helped to cram the pews of St. Austin's Church.

Dr. O'Grogan saw to it that his figure found the limelight quite as often as the gaitered legs of his brother-in-law. How he contrived to do it was a source of perpetual speculation to Keatings, his son. Sometimes the doctor would startle the air of Kensington by preaching a series of Sunday Evening Sermons on current stage plays; and Monday's newspaper would show an inch or two allotted to the meatier morsels of his discourse, under some such heading as "Vicar and Modern Morals;" and Keatings, pondering this insertion, would inquire of Joyce: "Now how did *that* get in? There were no reporters

in church last night ; I was careful to see that. Do you think the old gentleman has a publicity agent ? I fear it. I fear the worst." Once the *Daily Graphic*, under the heading "Striking Attitudes of a Popular Preacher," published six studies, side by side, of Dr. O'Grogan's gestures in his pulpit ; and Keatings brought the pictures into the breakfast-room, summoning Joyce : "Joyce, come here. That's our pulpit, without a doubt ; which means that these portraits were only taken by flashlight. Dr. O. has a bounce, hasn't he ? I rather admire it." St. Austin's, Kensington, was one of the first churches to use the "moving pictures" as a handmaid to religion ; an innovation which pleased every sub-editor in London and earned an honourable half-column, entitled "Biograph in London Church." Keatings was pleasantly titillated. "The old gentleman's brought it off again," he crowed. "'Struth, it's wonderful ! I tell you, Joyce dear, our Dr. O. is worth his money, if only for the amusement he gives us—as he used to say himself of Captain Alum." And Joyce read the half-column, and exclaimed : "The darling ! Bless his heart !"

Indeed, Keatings sucked unfailing joy from his father's existence ; filial irreverence, he had found, was the surest stage-laugh in the dining-room ; so he would stand at the window and look down the street for his father's return from a preaching engagement, and when he saw him coming, would announce : "By Christopher ! it was a dam-good sermon. I always know ! When he's a bit springy at the knees like that, and swings his umbrella, it means that he's highly satisfied with his performance. By gad ! there was *one* person who enjoyed the sermon this morning !" And the rest of the family rushed to the window, and gathered round Keatings, to study the spectacle of a conqueror returning.

The success of the Gabriels infected Tony, the youngest O'Grogan, with a secret, tingling ambition to be the one who should carry the Family's standard miles beyond the furthestmost advance of the Gabriels'. Tony, by the age of fourteen and a half, had a secure confidence in his own abilities. This was no heady inflation due to his rapid advance at St. Paul's, but just that consciousness of power which is sometimes alight where power is. He could *feel* that he saw at once and brilliantly things that fogged the brains of others and furrowed their brows. And with this confidence went swelling, tingling ambitions. At fourteen and a half he carried on his shoulders,

In the place of a head, a sealed box packed with dreams and schemes and ambitions. On the whole he most favoured the idea of being England's national poet and having a large estate like Tennyson's Farringford at Freshwater. Certain strange emotions, hidden away, because of their strangeness, in his sealed box, encouraged him to hope that he had that quality of difference which makes a poet. Neither to his school-fellows or to his brothers, could he publish the instant and almost painful response which trembled in his throat and eyes and lips, not only at the sound of lovely words, but at the description of anything that attained sublimity—were it the immense and patterned achievement of Newton, or the prodigious disturbance of Napoleon, or the pioneering vision of Kepler among the stars. When one of his masters, a Mr. Jamieson, who had much influence over him, waxed enthusiastic on these things, surely it was in Tony alone that tears struggled to break their prison behind his set lips and his shut teeth.

About another "difference" in him he felt less happy. How was it that that self-torturing love which he had given to Wavers, just because the boy's face had agitated him, now struck him as absurd, and he could look upon Wavers, who had recently arrived at St. Paul's as a leggy twelve-year-old, with complete indifference; and yet, in spite of this, he should be always seeking, and sometimes finding, the same experience again? Was it a shameful thing, or was it not, that he should always long for these secret loves which, though he knew them to be only transient and self-suggested, could yet make his life resplendent for a month or two, while he thought eternally of the one person, and hung about waiting for him, and tortured himself with doubts of him?

It was when he was nearly fifteen, and had lately read in "The Revolt of Islam" of the love of Laon and Cythna—who, so Mr. Jamieson told him, had been brother and sister in Shelley's first draft of the poem—that he began to consider the possibility of making Peggy the object of his adoration. He had always liked her the best of his family, and could see now, for the first time, that beauty was coming to birth in her; for Peggy, at sixteen, had the grace of a timid gazelle, and the colour of a peony when she was shamed (which was often), and a large full-lipped mouth (to the nausea of Keatings) and big eyes in which pensiveness was finally set, because behind them was her quaint conscience, as sensitive

and shivering as the hinder half of a wasp. He could like her immensely; he could admire her and be proud of her; but could a sister ever give him the sweet aches that he desired, and the long inward hours? It was very difficult to believe; but he resolved that the experiment should be tried.

Of late he had discovered the River. And to build his intimacy with Peggy, he would sometimes put her in the stern of a double-scuttling skiff, and display his own accomplishment, and teach her to row. And she was always delighted to go, because she was flattered by her younger brother's advances and very ready to adore him.

One sunny Saturday Peggy and Tony set off on bicycles for Richmond Bridge, whence they purposed a row and a sail to Kingston. Peggy was dressed in her tennis array: a white piqué frock, white stockings, a panama hat with her school ribbon of blue and yellow, and her brown hair in a long plait tied with a yellow ribbon. Tony, pedalling along, looked at her. "I'm glad you're in your whites," he said. He himself was also in white, from his rubber-soled shoes to the open collar of his shirt. Hat he had none, and his hair was already ablow.

On reaching Richmond Bridge, they carried their cycles down amongst the boats, and Tony, looking learnedly along the unruffled stream and up at the cloudless and burnished sky, demanded of a man in a jersey and a peaked cap: "Any chance of a sail? Looks deuced calm at present."

"She'll freshen later, I fancy," said the man.

"Good! Shove the sail aboard. . . . Peggy, you'd better sit in the stern and steer."

"Yes, that's best," agreed Peggy, relieved at the arrangement, for, though she didn't mind rowing when they were round a bend, she hated doing it before the eyes of the owner of the boat. So, before Tony could change his mind, she stepped expertly into the stern of the boat (held so comfortingly by the man in the peaked cap) and took the rudder lines. Tony, stepping in, stood in his place, and, pleasantly conscious of a few people watching from the parapet of Richmond Bridge, pushed his boat from the landing-stage. Then, sitting down, he took the oars and gave as fine a display of sculling as he could.

"Keep her head for the other bank, Peggy," he muttered, now ostentatiously feathering his oars on the water's smooth surface. "We're having a great popular success."

When he had pulled the boat out of sight of the bridge, he invited Peggy to come and scull behind him, adding rudely: "It's just the place for your style of sculling. The river's so nice and wide."

"All right," said Peggy. "But, Tony: I think I'll only row one oar, till I get used to it again."

"Righto!" Tony consented.

He bent his head and his body that she might step across him to her place in the bows behind; and when he had seen that her oar was properly in its rowlock, and her wrist-action was shaping aright, and her back was straight and her stomach down, he leaned forward on his own stroke-oar, and cried to her behind him: "Now then, Bow, are you ready? Forty strokes to the minute! *Go!*"

And he pulled with such force that Peggy's contribution to the motive power was negligible, and the boat's head swung round for the bank.

"Gosh!" he exclaimed; but not in ill humour, since he knew he had purposely pulled hard to demonstrate his superior strength. "Now then, we'll pull together. You pull your hardest, and I'll pull gently;" which he did, using but one hand.

The boat now travelled steadily; and the stillness of the stream, the soothing *suff* of the boat's movement, the clapping of the water against its sides, and the distant gossip of the birds, all threw their enchantment over brother and sister, who yielded themselves to mechanical rowing and silent thought. Not even Tony cared to clown, as they passed the flowered lawns, gold and green in the sunlight, whose weeping willows were so tranced and still that it seemed they had never moved. The silence that lives under the branches of willows on tranquil noons, and flies to the dark heart of the fir trees when the wind is up, was basking, this hushed hour, in the open sunlight on lawn and far-stretching meadow. A water-rat's splash sent a trembling through it, that endured for a little while, like the ring of ripples on the shivered water. It was mid-day now, and sometimes they passed a punt moored under the trees, while its lolling occupants lunched on green things, beneath a coloured awning. From higher up the stream came the twanging of a banjo, and a pleasant voice singing: "I *do* feel sorry that I *was* set free; Massa and the Missus were so good to me." And once a kingfisher flashed by, in a quick flame of blue and gold.

"Thank God for the river," said Tony at last; and it was the lyrical cry of his emotion.

They would have saved much time had they hauled their boat over the rollers at Teddington, but whoever took to the rollers when there was a chance of being shut in behind lock gates, lifted up and up on the rising water, and then ushered out through the stately-opening doors on to the higher levels?

"Gosh! There's more breeze up here," cried Tony, as he pulled past the weir. (A boy is ever the slave of one exclamation, and "Gosh!" had been Tony's master for years now.) He was keeping his eyes on the western and private bank, scanning it for a likely, if illegitimate, bathing place; and at last he saw an ideal spot, where the trees, rising from undergrowth, bent to the water and their branches essayed to brush its surface. "There we are!" he cried. "Gosh! there we bathe!"

"Yes, let's," Peggy assented. The bathe, in which she could display some skilful swimming, was necessary, she felt, if she were to recover that place in her brother's favour which must have been lost by her maladroitness handling of her oar.

"Right! Hop out," Tony commanded, holding the boat to the bank by a tuft of rushes; and after she was disembarked, he jumped out too, and, taking the painter, moored the boat to an overhanging bough.

He picked up his costume and walked a little distance, to leave Peggy's disrobing to a private place. But, once out of sight, he was inspired to show her that he could undress and be in the water in less than sixty seconds. He dived in rather clumsily, and swam towards the middle of the stream where she could see him, but he did not turn his head till he heard her.

Peggy was a good swimmer, and was swimming with great resolution now, for the notion had entered her head that if she could cross to the other side and back again, she would indeed recover her reputation. She had not felt sure that the task was within her power, but as she hesitated, it had suddenly looked easy enough, and now she was off on the venture, calling: "*I'm* going over to the other side."

"Are you? So am I," cried Tony, who did not like the idea at all. But as Peggy's high opinion meant as much to him as his did to her, he started with a doubting heart to follow her.

And she, wishing she had never spoken, pursued her way into deeper waters and a wilder panic.

In fact, they both proceeded to crucify themselves on their desire for each other's praise.

Peggy's heart, when she found herself in the middle of the stream and saw that each bank was as far from her as the other, beat like an engine; but, observing that Tony was swimming at her side, with no outward sign of fear, though his strokes were becoming rather laboured, and being quite unaware that he, like her, was wondering if his last hour had come, she struggled on, praying silently but frantically to God. After twenty more strokes she was quite persuaded that the bank was as far off as ever; and she had a deathly moment when she suspected that they were travelling sideways in the current. The engine under her breast now throbbed wildly and erratically as if its controls had slipped; and her stroke increased to a panic velocity, her arms racing at times like a propeller above the water. She splashed Tony with arms and feet; and once they got entangled in each other, and both believed for the space of a second that all was over.

Still, neither would allow that it was not very enjoyable and easy. Tony decided to make one final bid for life; forty more strokes would he do, and if he were not in shallow water then, he would know that it was the end. But he had only counted twenty-nine when his lagging and aching feet struck a stone, telling him that he was in his depth. Turning round, he saw Peggy struggling home, and shouted:

"Come along! Don't give in. Gosh! it's as easy as winking."

Peggy, on arrival, tried to stand up, but staggered in the water with weariness.

"I wasn't going to give in," she expostulated, rather annoyed at Tony's patronage. "It was I who suggested it."

"All right," said Tony. "Well, now we've got to go back."

Peggy felt ready to cry, but quite determined to do anything her brother did. After her bragging, she couldn't ask him to swim over to the boat and bring it across.

"I'll just get my breath," she said.

And while she sat on the bank and kicked the water, to hide her thoughts, she came to a bargain with God. She asked forgiveness for her ostentation and for being quite unable to abandon it before Tony, and she vowed she would not be guilty of it again, if God would get her across to the boat. And when she got into that state of "feeling" that her prayer had been

heard and answered, she said with a fortitude that caused her some admiration :

"Tony, are you ready now? I am."

And she started back across the river, conceiving that she was being upheld by the Everlasting Arms. With a kind of fatalistic faith she rested in them, and it was strange how quietly and confidently she progressed, as she nailed her thoughts to faith, blinding them to aught else. They must not glance aside from God and His omnipotence, lest she sank like Peter on the lake. As long as she held tight to faith—oh, how steadily she was going, and how surely. Yes—wasn't it wonderful?—power was undoubtedly visiting her; and with power, exultation; and with exultation, the certainty of conquest. She went on and on, delighting in the answer to prayer; the boat's side showed itself very near to her now, and, glowing with excitement, she reached it, panted a thanksgiving, and thought how beautiful it was that one could go through a great spiritual experience as one swam from bank to bank in the sunlight.

Tony had come up too, and was gripping the gunwale.

"Why, it was stupidly easy," he declared, when his breath returned. "Gosh, I wish it had been twice as wide."

"So do I," began Peggy—but stopped, remembering her engagements with God.

"Shall we do it again?" said Tony.

Peggy climbed out of the water.

"We shall hardly have time, shall we?" she suggested, thinking it was clever of God to pull her up so sharply on the instant of her fall.

"No, we shan't. . . . And, Gosh! Peggy," he added, as he climbed the bank, and felt the wind on his wet costume "She freshens! Hurry up, and we'll sail to Kingston."

The wind was certainly rising; and under an obscured sun, the stream had turned slate blue. Tony was quickly back in the boat, erecting its mast and hauling up its sail. Then Peggy stepped into the stern and took the rudder lines; and Tony pushed off into a following wind, which immediately filled the canvas.

"Tony: look out!" cried Peggy, holding the lines taut as the boat careened and bore forward. "Tony: it's going."

"Of course it is," laughed he.

"Yes, but, Tony: it's going so fast."

"Of course it is. We've got the wind."

"Yes, but how do you stop it?"

"You don't stop it; you steer."

"But supposing we meet something?"

"Well, you steer round it."

"Oh, but when the moment comes, I always forget which rope to pull," pleaded Peggy, looking at her brother with a look rather like a dog's.

"In that case, we shall probably hit something," said Tony.

"Tony; I think you'd better steer."

"All right," conceded Tony, who was longing to take the lines.

And for the next hour he sent the boat scissoring through the water, as the scissors of a draper tear through a breadth of calico. He turned her head into the wash of passing steamers, to challenge that "sea-sick feeling;" he raced other less well-manned craft; while Peggy ate an overdue lunch, or dragged her fingers in the water, or stared dreamily at the houses on the banks, and the swans on the stream. And then they sighted the white bridge of Kingston.

There were real yachts on the water at Kingston, so Tony let down his sail, and they paddled about for an hour and went ashore and drank tea. And when they were back in the boat, Tony said, resting on his oars: "It's five o'clock. I don't think we'll stay at Kingston——" He began to pull gently. "I'm for going back. Didn't someone say: 'It's better to journey than to arrive?'"

"I believe so," said Peggy.

"And we ought to try to make Richmond before dark, don't you think?"

Peggy nodding, he put the boat in the flow of the stream and pulled towards home. They said little. There was something sad about rowing at the day's end past river stretches they had sailed up at noon. Tony, looking sometimes at Peggy, was thinking: "No. One can manage a decent sort of friendship with a sister, but one can't work up anything more. Not with a sister. It can't be done. The Laon and Cythna idea is all a barney." Silence seemed a due deference to the lowness of the sun. The houses on the eastern bank, staring into the sun's face, were luminous themselves, and threw long, scintillating reflections across the water; while on the other bank the sun-rays took stealthy cover and peeped from the

undergrowth and the willows. And before the brother and sister reached Teddington Lock, the light on the waterside villas turned to rose.

"Tired?" inquired Peggy of Tony, who was doing all the sculling.

"Not half!" he answered. "Absolutely done in."

Twilight surrounded Eel Pie Island, as later they passed it. And when, with a sigh of relief, Tony bumped the boat against the landing-stage at Richmond Bridge, and fell forward on his oars, in imitation of an exhausted racer, darkness covered the river. Peggy awoke from a trance.

"It's been lovely," she said. "But I'm quite glad to be home."

CHAPTER II

ORESTES AND PYLADES

IN this year and this summer term Tony read Montaigne, "Of Friendship," and, as it so fell, construed with Mr. Jamieson Euripides' "Iphigenia in Tauris," wherein was set forth the deathless friendship of Orestes and Pylades ; and these two writings, taken in successive mouthfuls, worked a powerful movement in his soul towards the building of a like friendship for himself. He began to look round for an Orestes. Privily, he decided to be in agreement with Montaigne that love with its "pricking and stinging" was a rash and wavering fire compared with true friendship, whose flame was "a general and universal heat, and equally tempered, all pleasure and smoothness." And he felt satisfied, though entirely without experience, that Montaigne was right in maintaining that "the ordinary sufficiency of women cannot answer this conference and communication, nor seem their minds strong enough to endure the pulling of a knot so hard, so fast, and durable." Let him then straightway build for himself a friendship on the model of Montaigne's; a friendship in which all things should now and henceforth be held in common: "wills, thoughts, judgments, goods, wives, children, honour, and life."

The Orestes of his choice was Raking. Raking walked home from school along Kensington Road to his mother's flat behind Olympia ; which meant that he and O'Grogan Minor, when at length they converged, could make the greater part of their homeward journey side by side ; and to this end they would wait for each other at five o'clock each evening, on the gravel that sweeps from the main doors of St. Paul's. An ill-assorted pair they looked ; for Tony was now tall, the gracefulness of his childhood lengthening into the gracelessness of

adolescence, while Raking was broad in the body and thick in the leg. He seemed maturer than Tony; adolescence had ripened quicker in him, and, as sometimes happens, it had widened his shoulders and his hips rather than lengthened his limbs. Like his figure, his face was big and coarse, with wide nostrils that moved much as he spoke, and little eyes that rarely looked at his listener—though this latter habit was due to no evasiveness, for he was unblushingly sincere in his talks with Tony, but to his simple ambitions, which kept his eyes resting on the future. It was of their ambitions that they talked on their homeward walk, with their schoolbooks under their arms.

Raking, who was on the Modern Side, would confess frankly that he had no sympathy with Tony's enthusiasms for poetry and painting and music: for him the open air; the army, if by any luck he could reach it; and if not, a poultry farm in England, or a ranch in Canada, or a plantation in Malay. A man's life should be lived, according to Raking, in riding-breeches and gaiters, with a gun slung behind his shoulders, and his shirt open at the breast, to the tanning of the sun and the wind. And when Tony suggested that he was not by any means convinced that a gamekeeper's life was the highest imaginable for man, Raking heard him not, but continued with a long, excited, spitting description of the finances of his poultry farm or the lay-out of his ranch. On little else, till the confidences deepened, did he speak well.

It did not dawn on Tony that a boy whose ambitions were so different from his own could never play the Etienne de la Boétie to his Montaigne. Sometimes, certainly, he felt a quick pain of frustration, when his ardent utterance of a difficult thought met nothing in his friend except incomprehension and boredom. And sometimes he was offended by a tinge of vulgar unscrupulousness in Raking; as when he said: "I don't see how you can blink your eyes to the fact that one can only get on by pushing others out of the road. You say friends are better than money—Yes, but the point is, you'll have far more friends if you're successful than if you aren't." To which Tony scoffed one word in answer, "Friends!" But they were soon drawn closer together by another subject, on which both could talk eagerly, in some of the most thrilling conversations they had known.

Ever called by the large horizons, Raking would lead Tony to the green spaces that lie against London—on to the high, empty

levels of Wimbledon Common, or down among the rolling green hills of Richmond Park—to any of those littered commons where Londoners, in their starved poetry, go to find the prairie. Always he must escape the pavement and the bricks. And tired and glowing delightfully after their swinging walk, they would recline under trees, in Richmond's coppices, or Wimbledon's hollows, or the woods that meet the Thames. And there, at first, they fell again to the planning of their future lives, Raking filling his with his steers and his stockyards, and Tony with libraries and pictures and the applause of men.

But in secluded places secluded thoughts well up for interchange. And if their talk about their coming lives had thrilled, this new kind of talk had such a grip that it held them to their places till nothing but the darkness and a chill in the air compelled them to make their move for home. They felt exalted to a higher life-power as they talked thus; life tingled in their throats and their bodies. In Tony the talk was always accompanied by a slight trembling of the heart and of the limbs, and followed by a faint nervous exhaustion.

It threw a new intimacy over their union, which blinded him to any crudeness or inadequacy in his friend. It made him believe that at last he had a friend after the pattern of the books.

"WHY—why—why should people be troubled like this?" was the half amused note of Raking. Though, to be sure, one wouldn't be without it, and its strange pleasure, he said; but it might have been arranged better; it was all rather a shame. Tony, when time after time this subject asserted its masterful claim over their solitudes, did more listening than talking. Much of Raking's argument was as exciting to him as to his friend; but to some of it he did not fully respond. When Raking admitted, in his stuttering language, that every girl with any beauty could trouble him to an unrest which was both a pleasure and a distress, and asked Tony if it were not the same with him, Tony shook his head and answered, No. This seemed to worry Raking, in whose talk there was far less of self-indulgence than of a bewildered search for fellowship. Didn't Tony, he asked, feel stimulated, when he was dancing, by the touch of his partner's waist?

"Gosh, no!" Tony smiled.

And Raking muttered: "Good Lord!" and dropped silent, as if he were unhappy about it, and felt alone.

"Well. . . . I don't know," said he at last. . . . "However, there it is. . . . There it is. . . . I suppose it'll stop one day."

It was inevitable that Raking, having led Tony adventuring into the remote green places, should lead him, sooner or later, on an adventure into these unmapped mysteries of the mind. The summer holidays had come then, and Raking had been invited to the cottage at Freshwater. Except with Keatings, who pronounced him a fool—a worser fool, even, than Derek—he was popular with the O'Grogan children, being, indeed, an Honorary Foof; which is to say that they had conferred on him the Honorary Freedom of the O'Grogan Family, a distinction very seldom granted. There were not above twelve Foofs in the world, and Mr. Flote, the little verger with the walrus moustache, was the senior brother of the order.

So Raking came to Freshwater; and Tony met him on Yarmouth pier and brought him in triumph on the coach. Followed great days for memory's store: days of exploration to Brook, where the fossilized forest lay under the sea; to Alum Bay, where the cliffs were of many colours; to Totland, where the nigger minstrels chorused:

"They do bite
In the Isle of Wight,
But you should try them in the Isle of Man,"

and, best of all, to Compton Farm.

To get to Compton Farm you toiled happily up the slope of Afton Down and mouched along the skyline to the top of Tapnell Down, where you stood for a while, and looked below, to where the farm buildings huddled in a hollow, with their teeming fields tilted on the hills all round. "Isn't it absolutely the quintessence of farm-ness?" Tony asked Raking once, as they stood looking at it thus. Raking demanded what the deuce he meant; and yet he of all people should have caught a meaning; for there stood the farm-house, with its flint walls and moss-rusted roof, its hay-stacks and barns, its round pond with the ducks swimming, and the cattle drinking; and up here you could listen to the ceaseless barking of its farm dog and the cackle of its poultry, and even, with a little imagination, smell the pigs and the cow-droppings. You smelt these very distinctly when you had dropped from the hill and entered upon its farm-road, strewn with feathers; and you accounted it a lovely smell.

One afternoon, pleasantly tired after their long walk, they sat in the front garden of the farm-house, between the privet and the porch, and drank their tea at an iron table, and ate as much new bread, farm butter, blackberry jam and cream as they desired, all for the charge of ninepence a head. Other visitors from Freshwater had come out for the same famous walk and the same famous meal, so that each of the six tables in the little yard had its company to tea. The table next that of Tony and Raking was entertaining two young girls, one black-haired and bold-eyed and blowsy, and the other of quieter colouring and less ample shape, but ready with her eyes, none the less. They earned many a glance from Raking, but few from Tony, who was devoting himself to a shattering of all his previous records with the blackberry jam and the cream. When he could do no more, he pushed the jam-pot and the cream-plate behind the vase of flowers and begged Raking never to mention such things again. He unloosened the knot of the sash that held up his white flannel trousers; and he sighed a long "Ah. . . ."

But Raking gave but a poor heed to this facetiousness; his brain was behind the eyes that were watching the two girls.

"You said there were ducks on this farm, O'Grogan," he observed. "I begin to think you're right."

"What? Those two?" Tony made a depreciatory *mon* with his lips. "Those aren't ducks, my boy; they're a couple of geese, and one of them's been fattened up for Christmas. And, if they knew how vile their Cockney quack was, they wouldn't let us hear so much of it. The dark one's been trying to interest you for the last ten minutes."

"I know," said Raking. "I think she's rather pretty—in her blowsy way."

"I should think she was the daughter of Isaac Abrams of Whitechapel. But there! I may be wrong. I am willing to admit so much—I am willing to admit that, in expressing this opinion, I may be wrong."

"Well, what about the little one? She's rather sweet, isn't she?"

Tony rested his elbows on the table and his chin on his locked fingers.

"Is she? . . . Well, anyhow, they're not worth worrying about."

"I'm not so sure. I rather like 'em."

Just then the dark blowsy girl, having listened with open mouth to a whispered story from her friend, let loose a shrill shriek of laughter, which she quickly suppressed behind her hand and converted into a giggle. Her eyes sought the two boys, to learn if the noise of her laugh had captured any interest there.

"Yoicks! she gives tongue!—whatever that means," muttered Tony. "Tally ho!—and all the rest of it."

But while he was speaking, both girls broke into such an absurd giggling, and swung their eyes away so hotly from Raking, and exclaimed so distinctly: "Oh, I sye!" that Tony immediately charged his friend, "By Jove! I believe you *wunk* at them."

"Certainly I did," acknowledged Raking.

Tony was more shocked at this than he had the courage to show; he was glad of the cover of his buffoonery. Though there was frivolity and irreverence enough at his vicarage home, yet much of its professional puritanism had filtered into his being; and it had simply never occurred to him that a boy of his class would wink at unknown girls of the servant class. This was the first time in his life that he had seen such a signal shot: had seen his sex, in the person of a public school-boy, calling to the other sex, irrespective of class; and he could not understand it.

The girls now got up and went into the front parlour of the farm-house to pay their bill and write their names in the visitors' book; and Tony, supposing that their performance was at an end, reverted to the subject of his digestion, and the grave difficulty he would have in walking three miles home. Raking also appeared to have abandoned interest in the girls, and vouchsafed it to the food instead, which he attacked anew, under the loud protests of Tony. Nor, when the girls reappeared and walked out of the garden gate, casting glances behind them at the boys, did he direct towards them more than a resigned, "what might have been" expression. And, as soon as they were gone, he gave himself to the task of leaving the jam-pot and the cream-jug stainlessly clean. This achieved, they pushed back their chairs, stood up, and staggered towards the porch. While Tony settled their reckoning with the comely farm-mistress, Raking seized the visitors' book for the pleasure of adding his third signature that month. He wrote it, and passed over the book to Tony with the words, "Olive Fowler,

and Emily Holt. So neither of them were Jewesses after all." And Tony, taking the book, read :

"Olive Fowler, 320 Chapel Street, Bethnal Green.

Emily Holt, 141 Longman's Buildings, Clerkenwell."

When they were out on the hill-side again, they saw the two girls high above them, and Raking was for giving them a "Coo-ey !" but Tony said : " Good Lord, no ! What on earth for ? " The girls, however, looking down, had seen them, and it was evident from the lifting of their shoulders that they were giggling stupidly. Soon they linked arms and began to sing, because they were at the top of their climb, and had begun a journey that would be level and quick, over the springy turf. The tune, on their high treble voices, floated down to the boys below :

" Keep off the grass, keep off the grass, keep off the grass in the garden ;
Play at your ease, but if you please,
Keep off the grass in the garden."

Neither Tony nor Raking was in any condition to climb fast up the hill, and presently the girls were over the brow and out of sight. Exhausted by the climb, the boys collapsed on the summit of Tapnell Down, choosing their couch in the lee of some gorse. Here they lolled for an hour, pulling thistles and chewing clover, and wearing down many a topic of talk ; till, at length, the evening light on the hills lifted them to their feet and sent them briskly down the slope towards Freshwater Bay. And because the hills were empty, and the example of the girls had inspired them, they shouted in shameless voice the songs that London's barrel-organs had rolled out that year. Parts of the slope were very steep, tempting them into the exquisite terrors of a run which nothing could stop. " Never mind ! Here goes ! " shouted Tony, and, outstretching his arms to preserve his balance, he began his breakneck career. Raking followed ; and soon both were speeding to the bottom of the visible world and wildly ejaculating, " Crikey ! I can't stop ! I can't stop ! I shall hit one of the houses, which would be a pity ! " Then Tony, with a thrill both lovely and horrid, caught his foot in a rabbit-hole, and pitched and tumbled and rolled. A sharp, sweetly pleasurable pain in his ankle told him

that it was sprained. Raking slowed down, and turned up the hill to his fallen friend.

"Dead?" he inquired.

"No, only slightly sprained."

"Can you walk?"

"I dunno. I think, if you'll let me lean on your shoulder, I can."

"Of course. Hang on to me."

Raking came close, and lifted him, and placed one of Tony's arms on his shoulder, and his own arm round Tony's waist. Thus supported, Tony limped down the hill, laughing at his clumsiness and his grimaces, and surprising in his hidden heart one of those thoughts that he was sure no one else indulged—a satisfaction that he and his friend should have been forced so close together.

The first of the stars were up as they stumbled on to the waste of grass and tamarisk behind the broken sea-wall. And here the two girls appeared from amongst the chunks of concrete, and smiled at their stumbling, and followed them a little way. The elder and bolder of them, perceiving that Tony's accident was real, came up with an offer of help. Raking paused.

"It's awfully good of you," he said, looking straight into her eyes, "but what could you do? He's only sprained his ankle."

"I don't know," the girl confessed. "We could run and get 'im a fly, I ser-powse."

"Oh no," protested Tony. "I'm not bad."

"Well, look here, O'Grogan," Raking suggested. "I vote we sit down a bit, at any rate. You're no light weight after all that tea."

"All right."

"Is there anywhere we can sit quietly—Olive?" Raking asked of the girl.

"'Ark at 'em Oliving me! 'Ow did yer know my nyme was Olive?"

"Guessed it. Haven't you an olive skin and black hair?"

"Ow, stow it! *I got it!* It was that there visitors' book."

"Never mind all that. Where are we going to sit the wounded man down?"

"There're some seats in the New Road, ain't there, Emmy?"

The younger and fairer girl said: "Yes, there was, if 'e could walk so far."

"Anywhere, anywhere," Tony agreed. "It's passing off."

"Well, you look real pale," said the younger girl. "Won't yer rest yer'uther arm on me, too?"

"Oh, thanks," Tony smiled—awkwardly. "That's ripping of you."

Raking watched him as he put his arm on her shoulder.

"Golly!" he laughed. "It was worth spraining one's ankle for that." And he at once sprained his own, and seized it with his hand, and hopped for several paces in his agony. "Yoo-hoo. Won't someone lend *me* a shoulder?"

In a second the darker and bolder girl had put her arm around his waist.

"Come along, pore boy," she soothed. "Now, down't holler. Lean on yer auntie."

"Oh, thank you, Auntie Olive. . . . By George, O'Grogan, it's an ill wind that blows nobody any good," laughed Raking, squeezing affectionately his new crutch.

"Down' be silly!" the girl giggled.

And all four, interlaced together, walked and stumbled towards the New Road. When they had reached a seat under the hedge, Raking looked up and down the empty road and said:

"O'Grogan, we must reward these angels of mercy. Where can we get them some chocolates?"

"We down' want no chocklits," Olive assured him. "You can be nice to us, that's all."

"What's 'being nice' mean?"

"Down' be silly!"

"If it means a kiss, my child, here goes." And to Tony's amazement and discomfort, he seized the girl and kissed her, softly at first, and then hungrily. She accepted it, and even put her hand behind his head caressingly.

"I say, O'Grogan," said Raking, cuddling Olive close into his side. "It seems to me that that seat supports you as well as I can, and a rest'll do you good, with someone to nurse you a bit. I think Olive and I'll breeze along to the next seat. Eh? Come on, Olive. So long, O'Grogan—only for a minute or two."

He walked slowly away with Olive to a seat in view, where they sat like lovers.

Tony felt his companion lean against him, and, as if bound in duty to respond to her, he arranged an arm along her shoulders. This seeming inadequate, he forced himself to put a kiss on her

hair. That would be enough, surely, till Raking returned. But the girl, after resting against him for a little while, suddenly looked up mischievously into his eyes, and shocked him into an embarrassment that turned his heart into a blob of air, by saying sarcastically: "*Well!* You aren't a softy, are you? No. *Oh no!*"

So unexpected this, and so out of key with the character he had given her, for he had conceived of her as shy and sweeter than Raking's forward creature, that he blushed to his hair-roots, half withdrew his arm, and felt as eager for escape as ever in his life.

"There! Don't take 'ard what I said," the girl consoled. "I think I like 'em better when they're not too saucy and coming-on, like. I like you, I do—*reelly*. I like you a sight better than '*im*, what's with Olive." And she nestled back into his arm. "What's your nyme?"

"O'Grogan."

"O'Grogan! *Niaow!* Down' be as stand-orfish as orl that. Wot's your Christian nyme?"

"Antony."

"Crimes! I'm moving in the Upper Ten, I think. Wot outlandish nymes you swells do 'ave! Mine's Emmy."

"Is it?" Tony smiled an acknowledgment of this courtesy. "And what do you do when you're at home?"

"Ow-*jer* mean?"

"What's your—er—employment? Have you a place of business, or do you work at home?"

"You're not being funny, are yer?"

"No." Tony's heart dropped again, lest he had used some phrase which, in the currency of Clerkenwell, might support a secondary meaning. "What's your job?"

"Quite respectable. Olive and me works at a milliner's. I bin there two years nah, ever since I lef' school, where I was in the top standard, my dear—I'd 'ave yer know. I'm sixteen, yer see, and Olive's ight-*een*. We're 'avin' our week's 'oliday nah. We've saved up for it all the year. We come three days ago, so it's already nearly over, as you might say; but lor! it isn't 'alf being a treat. I never bin to the sea before. I bythed yesterday and this mornin'. *Ugh-b-b-b!* Cowld, but ever so jolly. I shall bythe to-morrer and the dye after, you bet—we've only jest those two dyes lef', worse luck. . . . And that there farm to-dye, where we sor

you—it was 'eavenly !' Avin' our tea in the gardin, with the smell of the cows comin' over the 'edge—I liked it, I did."

A wave of compassion rose in Tony; her words were a revelation—a peep-hole giving him his first view of a whole order of existence, over which pity might well be spent; he remembered her "remark" written in the Visitors' Book at Compton Farm, "A very nice Tea;" and his arm drew her closer in sympathy.

"That's right," she said. "Nah we're gettin' relly friendly."

The compassion stayed—indeed, this night sowed the seed of it for ever—but it had not ousted the repulsion, or the fear; and he looked anxiously towards Raking, in the hope that he would soon be coming back. With intense relief he saw that those two had left their seat and were sauntering towards them, arm in arm. But the relief faded into anxiety again, when Raking said:

"I say, O'Grogan! Olive and I have decided that this is too nice a friendship to let drop. We're going to meet again to-morrow night; you and Emmy, and Olive and I."

In their bedroom under the thatched eaves they talked till midnight, for Raking, inflated with memories of Olive's form in his arms, had introduced the old, dubious, disturbing, but exalting questions. Why—why—why should it be so? Wasn't it all funny? If Olive and Emmy had been strange and common boys, he and Tony would have thanked them for their kindness and escaped as quickly as possible from their offending talk and their vile Cockney accent. But as it was. . . .

And then Tony surprised Raking, by assuring him across the darkness between the two beds, that he had felt exactly this repulsion from Olive's and Emmy's vacuous minds and their awful accent, and devil a hint of any other emotion.

"Good Lord!" came Raking's surprised voice.

"Sorry! But it's the truth."

"What, you felt nothing at all?"

"No; except that I felt frightfully sorry for Emmy when she said she'd never seen the sea before, and went so potty over having her tea at Compton Farm."

"Well, I don't understand. . . ."

"I think," Tony explained, not without pride in the coming words, "that I shall have to establish a mental affinity with a girl, before I can begin to love her, and want to hold her, and all that."

"Oh, *love* . . . yes," agreed Raking. "But I don't think I'm speaking of love. There's no love about this. I couldn't spend ten minutes with Olive, if we had to walk apart, but I could walk ten hours with her if I might just have my arm round her waist, and a kiss now and then. That's what's so funny. Do you mean to say you don't feel like that?"

"No."

"Good Lord!"

"Honestly," continued Tony, "I don't believe I shall ever want to touch a girl till I've learned to love her. Then——" his mind came alight, and his body a-tingle at the beautiful vision—"I'm sure I shall want to hold her closer than ever I can get her."

Raking was impressed.

"That'll be the real thing, of course. *I* shall want that, too. . . . Jove, yes! . . . But before it comes, don't you feel you want to kiss every beautiful face you see, and would like to have its eyes looking up into yours, waiting for you to kiss it again?"

It was certainly, at first mention, a pleasing picture; and Tony, lying there in the darkness, promptly re-painted it; himself standing in the New Road, and every girl he knew, one after the other, taking up the designed position. And after fair consideration, he replied:

"No, I could get no pleasure out of her kisses or her eyes, if I knew all the time that it was only a temporary sham."

"Good Lord!" muttered Raking.

And the darkness was empty of any voice, till he muttered again:

"Good Lord! *I* could."

He gave further thought to the mystery, and then asked:

"Doesn't the prospect of meeting Olive and Emmy to-morrow night hold any attractions for you, then?"

"No. I can't say that it does. . . . Except, as I've told you, that I feel frightfully sorry for Emmy. . . . I say, do you know Hobman Major—Hobman, C. E.—in the Lower Seventh, a rather clever ass, who's a Socialist and says so outright, in his speeches in the Union. . . . I think *I* shall be a kind of a Socialist.

... It seems such a shame that a girl like Emmy should be sixteen years old before she's ever seen the sea. . . . Or had tea at a farm. . . ."

"Oh, you can't be a Socialist," Raking protested. "No gentleman's a Socialist—only the greasy rotters like Hobman. . . . But I say, you'll come to-morrow night, I suppose? I can't entertain them both. You see . . . what I hoped was, that you would go off and be happy with Emmy, and Olive and I could breeze off in another direction."

"Oh, I'll play your game for you all right," Tony promised—and suddenly added, "so long, of course, as it *is* playing the game."

"What do you mean?" Raking's voice had most noticeably side-stepped towards indignation.

"Oh, don't be huffy. I mean, so long as we *both*—well, *you* know."

"We'll be playing the game, so long as we don't force unwanted attentions on a girl. I'm not going to do that."

"Shall we? I dunno. After all, they're such ignorant little fools. . . ."

"We're only going to give them some fun."

"Yes, but—oh, I don't know. . . ."

And not knowing, he lapsed into silence.

"The fact is," came Raking's voice at last, and it was sulky: "It's easy for you to take the high line. You only seem to be half alive."

"All right, old man, all right," soothed Tony. "Don't let's quarrel. I'll go with you. It's all experience."

It was their first near approach to a quarrel, and Tony, for a moment, saw the gulf between them. But he turned from its contemplation. There was an aridity, a disappointment, in such thinking that wasted the heart.

Soon he was asleep.

The two girls were waiting for them, just before dark, at the gate leading into Tennyson's Lane. Tennyson's Lane had been chosen by Raking because it was locally known as "Lover's Walk." It was a rutty road, dark and dappled under its over-arching trees, and spanned, after a few hundred paces, by a rustic bridge, over which the poet was wont to cross from one

part of his garden to another. Olive was sitting on the gate, and Emmy leaning against it; and they grinned at their approaching swains.

"Get off!" Raking commanded Olive; and he lifted her bodily off the gate and kissed her mouth; provoking her to exclaim, "*Well!* Look at that now! He isn't a proper saucy-box, is he?" and to add, as she touched her dress into order again, "No, don't you believe it, girls." Tony stood near Emmy, and wondered in disquietude if he ought to do something equally friendly by her. He felt like an actor in a home-made charade, who, wanting to acquit himself creditably, becomes increasingly conscious of his awkwardness and artificiality. All he could bring himself to do was to offer his hand in greeting to Emmy, at which reverence he observed that Olive suppressed a giggle.

"Well, I guess we'll walk up the lane, and on to the downs," said Raking.

"Righto!" assented Tony, eager to appear at ease.

"Yes, and—and—when we get to the foot of the downs, Olive and I'll go one way——" he drew her against him—"and you and Emmy the other. Two's company, but four's a crowd."

"Righto!" repeated the actor in the charade.

Then Olive, who had been watching Tony, said boldly:

"I believe he's afraid of us."

"Don't be silly," protested Tony, dropping at once into her idiom.

"Yes, he is. He's not struck on us at all, Emmy. I shouldn't wonder but what he's feeling all goosey about us. You needn't, you know. We're not *bad* girls; we only want a little fun sometimes, and we shan't split to anyone about you, see? You mustn't think we're a couple of tarts."

Raking roared with laughter at the word, but Tony recoiled inwardly; and Emmy said, "Give over, Olive—do."

"Well, does he *look* happy? I arst you!"

"Don't be silly," replied the tongue-tied actor; and with a strong, histrionic effort, he playfully smacked her cheek.

"Oh, he's coming on!" laughed Olive. "He'll be kissing me next."

Raking laughed too, and Tony felt more and more uncomfortable.

"Well, this is a bit public for these endearments, isn't it?"

said Raking. "Children, come along. Up the lane and on to the downs."

With his arm round Olive he led the way for Tony and Emmy. The gate of Tennyson's Lane swung to behind them; and the adventure was begun. Tony, anxious to build a character for ease and assurance, not only grasped Emmy's waist, but drew her head against his shoulder; and, thus holding her, followed his friend some twenty paces behind. Still building, he laid question upon question, as they occurred to him; but he heard, in every sentence, his own insincerity and discomfort, and, hating that poor Emmy should hear it too, began to rake around, almost frantically, for solider material. He was silently busied on this research when she suddenly laid waste the whole uneasy building with the remark:

"What's the matter with yer to-night?"

"Nothing, silly. What do you mean?"

"Why, you're thinkin' of summin else all the time."

"I'm not."

"Yes, you are. You're *slow*."

"Slow to what?"

"Oh, I dunno. But you're not relly enjoying yourself."

"I am! What do you expect me to say or do?"

"*Expect!* It wouldn't surprise me to see you 'op it, any old moment; no more it wouldn't!" She moved sulkily. "Not if I give you 'alf a chance."

"Don't be stupid!"

After this interchange all sentences seemed more disastrously unreal than before. In compassion for her he raked in his mind for some arrangements of words that might sound convincing; but now a dull block of a thought was buffering his rake at every turn: "There's nothing in it. It's all too silly. . . . But oh, if Emmy were the girl one really loved, how absolutely gorgeous this walk would be!" And this sudden sweet vision of the real beloved walking with him in the lane drew him after it into a silence.

Half way along the green corridor of Tennyson's Lane, its trees opened to the sky, and there was a road which, turning to the left, ran through fields of wheat and mangolds to the footways of the downs. The two couples turned along it. Twilight had lowered down upon the earth, so that the downs, seen through it, were a long featureless undulation, silhouetted against the sky; and at sight of them, Tony, alarmed by his

protracted silence, broke it with the first words that came into his head, which were some lines of Tennyson, whose bridge they had just seen. He began to recite :

“Where far from noise and smoke of town
I watch the twilight falling brown,
All round a careless-ordered garden,
Close to the ridge of a noble down.”

“That’s nice,” said Emmy. “Po-try.”

“Tennyson,” Tony endorsed. “He wrote it about this very place ;” and, lest the conversation slid away, he continued anxiously :

“For groves of pine on either hand,
To break the blast of winter stand,
And further on the hoary channel
Tumbles a billow on chalk and sand. . . .

Tumbles a billow on chalk and sand,” he repeated to himself, forgetting Emmy as he savoured the line. . . . “Tumbles a billow on chalk and sand. . . .”

“’E’s dead, isn’t he—Tennyson? We use’ter do ’im in the top standard.”

“Yes. My father went to his funeral. They sang his own ‘Crossing the Bar’—You know :

‘Sunset and evening star’—

I wonder if he wrote that line on a night like this :

‘And one clear call for me,
And may there be no moaning of the bar
When I put out to sea,

‘But such a tide as, moving, seems asleep,
Too full for sound or foam,
When that which drew from out the boundless deep
Turns again home. . . .’ ”

“Oh, I *like* that,” Emmy declared.

“Yes, it’s pretty fine, isn’t it : ‘When that which drew from out the boundless deep, Turns again home . . .’? I wish I’d written that line. . . .”

They were now on the turf at the bottom of the downs, and Raking had turned along the track that led towards Alum Bay. Tony, pleased that those in front should hear his voice in a continuous flow and so believe him completely at ease, hastily sent on the night air :

"There's another poem which they say he wrote at Alum Bay, just at the end of this track :

'Break, break, break,
On thy cold grey stones, O sea . . . '

But now Raking swung round.

"I say, O'Grogan ; this isn't a game of 'Follow my leader.' We love you and Emmy dearly, but this is our road, please."

"Oh . . . I see . . ." said Tony, momentarily nonplussed ; but he quickly called back with a well-made laugh, "All right, Emmy and I'll shin a little way up the downs."

They climbed twenty steps, and sat down. As in duty bound, Tony drew Emmy against him, and immediately the paralysis of speech sickened him again. And when the silence had amassed into an alarming size, he attempted a diversion by uttering his current thought.

"I wonder how they keep these endless miles of turf so close-cut."

Emmy sniggered in his arm.

"Reckon they come with a pair of nail-scissors twice a week," she suggested.

This was a lump of lead tossed into his heart, and sinking it horridly. The silence amassed itself again, while Emmy just lay against him, and he suffered. Over the skyline came the moon, laying its light down the slope of the hill and flooding the track at its foot, where the figures of Olive and Raking could be seen walking up and down in a lovers' hold. At last they too sat down together.

Emmy spoke next. And the sensitive Tony perceived that she had guessed he was foundering in this unfamiliar sea of flirtation and had thrown him a life-line.

"Tell me some more po-try," she said. "I like it."

He seized the line willingly. He spoke, and spoke well, of his enthusiasms. He quoted for her the greater part of Longfellow's, "The day is done and the darkness Falls from the wings of night ;" and asked her if it wasn't "absolutely really rather superb." He spouted Milton's sonnet "On His Blindness ;" and swore that it was "absolutely conking." And, seeing that she was much impressed by his learning, he passed on to the "Iphigenia in Tauris," and enjoyed the ostentation of telling Emmy that he read it in the original Greek. "Lor !" she ejaculated. "Yes," he said ; and gave her some of the

Greek lines, both as a proof of his honesty and that she might hear how absolutely wonderful they sounded ; and she agreed that they were very select—such was her word, and he marvelled at it.

They could go no further, in this route : Emmy's intellect had ceased to function. So she suddenly headed him into a new field.

"Tell me all about your 'ome. 'Ave you a family of brothers and sisters ?"

"Good Lord, yes !" (Tony had lost the old "Gosh !" and caught "Good Lord !" from Raking.) "There are five of us."

"Tell me about 'em, one by one."

"My eldest brother's called Keatings. . . . Yes, he's called after that, I suppose. . . . He's nearly twenty-one now, and a dry sort of cove. Just gone to Germany for a holiday."

"Oh, how *lovely* ! Crikey ! Don't I wish I had money like you."

"Yes . . . and then there's my eldest sister, Joyce."

"Ah, tell me all about her. How old is she, and is she pretty ?"

"She—she must be nineteen. I suppose she's pretty ; people say so. She's gone to the Lakes, to a place called Grandelmere . . ."

Emmy did not interrupt : only listened, as a child listens to a fairy tale, finding the simplest words enough for her imagination to paint with. And Tony, rattling on, wondered why he should draw a pleasure from "showing off" before this girl ; why, since the painting of Joyce's good fortune must hurt a little, he should be so willing to mix a brutality with his very real sympathy.

"I suppose she's got a lotta lovely clothes ?" asked Emmy.

"Oh, I don't know. Not so many," Tony answered, somewhat ashamed of his brag. "We're not so frightfully well off."

"Oh, *no* ! It don't sound like it, *do* it ? Germany for your brother, and the Lykes for your sister. No : you're starvin', of course. . . . And 'as she a boy ?"

"A what ?"

"A friend. A lover, if you like. I suppose she has. Shore to."

"Yes . . . well . . . we rather think there's a fellow *who's* a bit gone on her. But it's only beginning."

"Ah, well, I 'ope she pulls it orf. . . . And 'oo comes after Joyce? Another gurl?"

"No; my brother Derek. He's all right, I suppose, but we generally think he's rather a sidey swine. Dreadfully solemn and self-opinionated."

"I know the sort. We got 'em our way. Does 'e go to College too?"

"He'll be going to Oxford in a term or two. . . . And then there's my other sister, Peggy."

"Ah! What's she like?"

"She's seventeen now, and a curious kid."

"Is she pretty?"

"S'pose so. At least, I think so. She's not generally considered to be as pretty as Joyce, but I think she's a dam-sight prettier. I don't see what they rave about in Joyce. . . . At any rate, Peggy's *nicer*. I like her best of all."

"I like Peggy best, too," said Emmy, after a pause. "*I sye*, I must evva peep at her—to-morrow—oh, you needn't be afryde. I shan't let on that I know you, or get you into any trouble. I'll keep meself outa sight. And the next dye I shall be gorne. . . . But I'd like to 'ev seen her. You dow' mind, do yer?"

"No, no," Tony laughed. "Though I don't suppose she amounts to very much, really."

Emmy picked a wisp of grass and chewed it.

"And do you live in a big 'ouse in town?"

"Not so big."

"How many rooms?"

He told her; and once again he found himself pleased to be stirring her envy by his talk of four different sitting-rooms, and to be aware that, in endeavouring to give her a true portrait of St. Austin's Vicarage, he had ended by presenting her with an enlargement of it. Their talk was interrupted by a quick exclamation of Emmy's, her grasp on his arm, and her fingers pointing to the turf road, twenty feet below them.

"*I sye!* 'Oo's that old codger walkin' down there? Oh my! He's got long 'air, ain't he? Crimes——!" she giggled loudly—"if that isn't a fair knock out! Olive oughta see 'im. What is he?"

It was Captain Alum, strolling an easy serpentine course along the level grass, and humming gently to himself. His peaked cap was under one arm, and his black waved hair lifted

in the wind from his brow and his shoulders. To-night his bundle dangled at his leather belt, and his boots flapped on his feet, leaving the stout stick, which so often had carried this baggage, free to pass behind his waist and under his jacket while his elbows crooked around it. This forced the blue jacket behind him and allowed his thick, wide chest to come forward and meet the good breezes of Heaven. Tony did not catch what air he was humming, for the old man, on hearing the quickly suppressed giggle of Emmy, stayed his walk and his tune, and gazed up at them.

"The Lord be with you, my pretties," he said; and straight-about pressed the stick into the turf and climbed the twenty feet towards them.

Tony looked up at the black-bearded face, when it halted; and Emmy looked down at the grass, in the agony of her giggle.

"It's very, very good to be young," said Captain Alum, shaking his head, as a man does who feels the full poetry of his words. "It is good to be as young as you are, and to love one another. . . . Be happy; Be happy. . . . I shall praise God for the sight of you this night."

Tony being empty of a reply, and Emmy being yet in the grip of her giggle, Captain Alum could only stare down at them across a silence; till he offered for their information:

"I am an old man waiting on the mercy of God."

"How do you mean?" asked Tony, finding his tongue.

"Well, sonny, it's like this: I've lived my life, and loved like you, and lost sight of those that I loved; I've had my troubles and my despairs, as *you* will, poor children, and sometimes I've even thought of putting a knife to myself. I've had my joys—and sinful, too, many of them were; I've married and had sons and daughters and seen them go from me, and their very faces are not clear to me to-day; I had a brother and two sisters, and we played together, and *their* faces are going from me too. Everything departs and the Lord alone abides, and His face grows clearer every day, and it is very, very kind. Yes, seventy years have I left behind me, and I can hardly remember what filled them, so faded they are, my dears; and now I've nothing to do but wait for the end, and the last mercy of God. . . . It is very beautiful, my children, to wait."

"You don't look so very old," laughed Tony.

"Seventy-five," Captain Alum promptly informed him. "Sixty-three years of sin, and twelve in grace. I turned to the Lord at sixty-three, and He forgave me all. Since that great and blessed hour, I have lived only for Him, and perfect happiness has been mine. I pray you also may one day see His light—and your little maid too. But you're very young yet, and it is generally to be found on the farther side of suffering and punishment. May your share be light! . . . Dear, dear——!" he beamed humorously upon them—"how the Lord must love you both! . . . Ah yes! Yes! God keep your share of suffering light!"

Emmy had now recovered command of herself, and was eager to bury her offending giggle under her present goodwill.

"Do yer live here?" she asked.

"I live wherever God is, my maid; and that is wheresoever I sit down to rest. On a moonlight night like this, I find I lie closer to Him on His hills; but when I feel the rain coming I go to where there are workhouses or lodging-houses, and there I strive to meet Him in the souls of His less fortunate children."

"Yes, but——" Emmy persisted, now truly interested, "How-jer *live*—I mean, how-jer buy your food?"

Captain Alum smiled patiently.

"When I turned to the Lord and gave meself to Him, I took Him at His word. Doesn't He say, 'Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on'? And again, in another place, 'Seek ye first the Kingdom of God, and all these things shall be added unto you.'? Does anyone believe Him? No. But I did, and I went out in perfect trust."

"And 'as He never let yer down?" asked Emmy, not flippantly, but with earnest incredulity.

"Never. As the Scripture saith, 'Is He a man that He should lie?' I have tried to do His work for Him, preaching the gospel in season and out of season, as is commanded; and the people, moved by Him, have offered willingly."

"Seems a pity they don't offer enough for you to 'ave a proper 'ome," Emmy suggested.

Again he smiled patiently.

"My child, I want none. When in obedience to His word, 'The labourer is worthy of his hire,' I have taken what little I need for my simple wants, I give the rest away, as He also tells

me to do: 'Sell all thou hast and give to the poor, and come and follow me.' Why, this very day, missy, the pence came to me like manna from Heaven; twenty-three pence and one halfpenny; and I looked at the sky and saw that I should need only enough for a sup, because I should sleep under the stars to-night; so when I had bought my bread and cheese, I sat under a hedge and spread the pence that were left over, in a row along the grass, and said, 'There, Lord, that abundance is Thine. Thou wilt show me where I may give it.' And I got up and walked along, and soon I passed an old beggar, who had neither my happiness nor my strength, and I gave him enough for a bite and a bed; and then I passed another, and gave to him too; and then just as it was getting dark, I came across a man selling birds in cages, who told me he had done no trade for two whole days, so I bought one of his birds, and when I was out of his sight, I opened the cage door and bade the bird go to its freedom, and praise God. And it flew out, missy, wheeling and soaring into the sky; so that now——" he smiled happily—"whenever I hear a bird singing, I shall be able to wonder if it is mine, and to remember that I have sent a perpetual prayer and praise into the heavens above me."

"Lor, fancy doing that now!" said Emmy. "I should never'a thoughta that."

"I think it was rather a spiffing idea," Tony said, who was putting his hand into his pocket to find a sixpence, both because he wanted to show off before Emmy, and because he really liked the old man.

But Captain Alum refused the proffered coin.

"No, sonny. You keep your pence for your holiday, or for your maid. I have all I want for the day, and the morrow can care for itself. Buy something for the lass, and whatever you may do, be good to her. Be good to all maids." He was preparing to go, putting the peaked cap on his locks and the ferrule of his stick into the turf.

Tony stopped him for a minute. "I say," he ventured. "Would you let her hear you sing, as you go along? She's never heard you, but *I* have, and I thought it rather topping."

"No, no, no," laughed the old man, most unexpectedly turning bashful, like a child who has been asked to perform. "No, you don't want to hear me sing. Besides, it's a cracked old voice now, with no beauty for anyone except the Lord.

. . . No, God be with you, dears. And remember an old man's words: 'Keep innocency—keep innocency, for that alone shall bring a man peace at the last.' ”

He lifted his peaked cap high, and trudged off.

“Well!” exclaimed Emmy, when she had brought round her face from staring after him. “Well, did you ever? Is he barmy?”

“Don't know,” Tony replied. “We don't know whether he's a madman or a saint or a scoundrel. My pater says he's a bit of all three. But sometimes I can't help thinking that it must be rather wonderful to be just what he is. I mean, if one had the courage to care nothing about anything——”

He said no more; for Captain Alum, who had climbed upwards, had reached the skyline and decided, in that unabashing solitude, to humour Tony's request for a song. His voice bore down to them, diminishing as he passed beyond sight:

“I heard the voice of Jesus say,
‘Come unto Me and rest;
Lay down, thou weary one, lay down
Thy head upon My breast.’ ”

“Lor!” Emmy breathed. “It fair gets you, don't it.”

That evening Tony always regarded as the end of his friendship with Raking. The temperature-chart of their union had shown for twenty-four hours a steadily falling curve, and now the curve plunged to sub-normal. It was hardly a moral withdrawal on Tony's part, because morality in a young boy can seldom be strong enough for that; it was more of an æsthetic and intellectual withdrawal. In his blind way he began to feel the grating edge of Raking's insensibility, and to be chafed by it.

The next day, for example, Raking, having no use for Olive apart from the uses of flirtation, did not go down to the Bay to see them off by the Yarmouth coach, but Tony slipped guiltily there. And the first thing Emmy cried out, as she recognized him, was, “I sor' her! I sor' her! And yer brother too. Yes, I like Peggy. . . . Well, it was real nice of you to come and see the lambkins orf. And fancy you 'aving weeks more! Some people have all the luck! I shall think of you bything to-morrer morning, and 'aving your tea sometimes at that

there farm. Oh, don't talk about it, girls, it makes me wanta weep."

He helped them up the ladder of the coach, and lifted to them their cheap imitation-leather handbags.

"So long!" sang Olive; and "Too-to-loo!" sang Emmy; to which Tony gave the correct reply, "Pip-pip!" And he gave wave for wave till the coach had rolled out of sight. Then he wandered home, feeling pleasantly unhappy about Emmy Holt, and the life of drudgery to which she must return, and her first "bythe" in the sea when she was sixteen years old.

With Raking he kept up a fine pretence of unabated friendship; and when the day of Raking's departure came, cycled cheerily by the side of the Yarmouth coach, talked cheerily as they walked up the pier, stayed with his guest on the Lymington boat till the very last second before the gangway was hauled ashore, and then, with a humorous handkerchief or hat, waved the boat into the far distance of the Solent. But when it was a mere toy in the haze, he walked thoughtfully down the long pier. He mounted his cycle and rode alone through the familiar lanes, whistling so as to send a peeping sadness to its lair again. His picture of an ideal friendship with Raking had been an illusion—well, what of it? Life was long. Easy to see now what he had done: in his longing for a perfect intimacy he had given himself to the first dull youth who would encourage him, and chanced to walk the same road home. Good-bye, old Raking.

Queer how absolutely alone every one was, if you came to work it out! Himself; whom did he really *love*? His father and mother? No; not as he ought to. His brothers and sisters; well, no; Peggy a little perhaps; but his affection for her was not the sort to give him satisfaction. His school-fellows? Lord, no! they were mere fellow-passengers in the same boat. No, one was absolutely alone, unless one loved somebody perfectly and was as perfectly loved.

He was cycling along a lane where the golden afternoon light fell through the trees on to the floor of the road; and he was surprised that the beauty of it sharply hurt him.

CHAPTER III

BY GRANDELMERE

THERE was published in the spring of 1905, when Tony was sixteen and a half years old, a novel that shall be nameless here, because, though lovely in texture, it was too frail to battle in the world's market and was met by only a few. But these few spoke of it among themselves, less as a novel to be weighed and valued, than as a strange and vivid experience to be accepted without questioning and remembered with a welcome pain. And one of those to whom it came as such an experience was Antony O'Grogan.

The book had been introduced into the Vicarage by Joyce and her father, who had heard that its scenes were set in the very lakeland district where they had spent a summer holiday the previous year. Dr. O'Grogan, after reading it, spoke of it slightlying, possibly because Archdeacon Gabriel had spoken of it highly; Joyce enjoyed it, but chiefly, she admitted, because it was such fun identifying the hills and creeks where the heroine made love; and Mrs. O'Grogan entered upon it but retired before the close of the fourth chapter, getting up and declaring that her patience with the heroine was exhausted. The book was left lying for some three days on the hat-stand in the hall, in the company of other novels that were awaiting their return to the Circulating Library; and one night Tony, having finished his home-work and come out of the breakfast-room to stretch his limbs, glanced at it there and opened it. He read its first few pages, standing by the hat-stand, because he intended to return it to its place as soon as his faint curiosity was satisfied. But the book held him so firmly that he stood there for an hour, unaware of time; and then, when his legs wearied, walked, still reading, to the sofa in the empty drawing-room, where he flung himself down to continue in his pain.

To describe in a few words the meaning of that book would be impossible; it would need to be written again in its fulness, for the meaning was less in the story than in the luminous haze which lifted around it, tremulous with insubstantial sadnesses. Through its pages moved a wistful, round-eyed shepherd girl, with black hair, who wanted to take from life more than it could give and to offer it more than it could receive; and who, in the end, abandoned her search and withdrew her offering, and sat on the hillside alone, holding her knee between her hands.

Tony was still reading at ten o'clock; and he took the book up to his bedroom, and hurried into bed with none of his duties performed. He left the gas-light burning over the dressing-table—it could be controlled from the pillow by his own patent system of cords and pulleys; he drew the clothes luxuriously over his ears; and read on. When the last word was finished he put the book on the side-table, pulled the cord that doused the light, and settled himself further under the clothes. In that warmth he had thoughts for no one but the Gerda of the story—Gerda, with her black hair and her defeated eyes, as she sat on her hillside above the lake, holding her knee between her hands.

That same spring had seen the publication of "The Hill," and the reading of this famous book had given Tony an experience similar to that which he was knowing now. He had carried his enthusiasm, and his inevitable verdict, "It's absolutely too wonderful for words," to his favourite master, Mr. Jamieson, under whose tuition he had come a second time, as he moved higher up the school; but he had met there a disappointment, for Mr. Jamieson had shaken his head, and expressed surprise that a boy who could respond with real understanding to Sophocles and Euripides could also respond so uncritically to a work which, pleasant though it was, pretended to no more than popular values. And Tony's faith in his own discrimination had taken an awkward blow. And now, when the morning woke him from his dreams of Gerda, his sensations of mixed glamour, sadness and happiness were so like those that had followed his immersion in "The Hill" that he wondered if once again Mr. Jamieson would condemn him. Oh, no, no! Surely he was not wrong this time. If this book was not beautiful, he would retire from discrimination. It was beauty for him.

Resolving that his doubt must be laid, he approached Mr. Jamieson's desk after class that morning, and began :

" Please, sir ? "

" Yes, O'Grogan," acknowledged Mr. Jamieson.

" Sir. Have you read——" and he named the book.

" No, but I've heard of it. It's good, isn't it ? "

" I don't know, sir. That's what I want you to tell me."

" Who is it by ? "

" No one knows. It's anonymous."

" But what do you think yourself ? "

" I think it's absolutely the most beautiful book I've ever read—so I suppose it's pretty awful."

Mr. Jamieson smiled.

" I will certainly read it. I had intended to do so."

" When?—when? " asked Tony eagerly. " I—I can't get the book out of my head. I could bring it to you this afternoon; it's hidden in my bedroom."

" Why—what was it appealed to you so ? "

" I don't know, sir. I'm not even clear what it was about. I only know it seemed to say something I'd never heard said before—something that—oh! I don't know—made me want to say ' Yes! Yes! ' all the time. . . . And yet it didn't say it; it was—it was just behind all that it said."

" I know! " nodded Mr. Jamieson.

" Oh, I hope you'll like it! I couldn't bear—I should hate to lose faith in it now. And it wasn't like reading ' The Hill.' In that case I sort of fell in love with the characters, and wanted to imitate them, but here I—it wasn't exactly that I *loved* the heroine, it was that I—that I just *was* her—and one doesn't love oneself. . . . When do you think you'll have read it, sir ? "

" I think I shall have read it before to-morrow morning."

" Oh, good! And oh, for pity's sake, try and like it."

Next morning Mr. Jamieson summoned Tony to his desk, as the other boys were leaving, and when the room was empty, said :

" Well, I've read it."

" Yes, sir," answered Tony; and that moment there gripped him, with an actual physical effect in the shaking of his limbs, a nervous patience, a dulled resigned anxiety, such as might have filled the minute before hearing the result of a scholarship examination.

"It's an extraordinary book," continued the master, frowning as if his thoughts were fluttering in a high air, far away from words. "I—I see all that you meant. . . . Of this I am certain, that whoever wrote that book—and I think it was someone very young—wrote much better and much more than he knew. I don't suppose he had any idea of how big a thing he had done. . . . And yet 'big' isn't the word. . . ."

"My father said he thought it was *thin*."

"So it is. So it is," mused Mr. Jamieson. . . . "But then, gossamer is thin . . . and so is the wing of a dragon-fly. . . ."

"Mother said she thought it was silly."

"How 'silly'?"

"She said the heroine wanted a little common sense."

A smile spread on Mr. Jamieson's face.

"Your mother's fairly old, isn't she, O'Grogan? Well, I'm not young either, as you see . . . but I believe—I believe I haven't forgotten what it's like to be young. . . ." He seemed to search among his pens and pencils for further words. "Whenever I read a book of this peculiar quality I always think that the person who wrote it—in this case he, or she, was probably very young—was less of a conscious creator than a passive, suffering instrument. Like a—like a harp . . . on which the winds of the world have suddenly breathed—almost without its knowledge—and its strings give out a true chord . . . to which we all listen in a dumb, answering pain. . . ."

A dumb, answering pain; Tony, with his sense for words, stroked these over, to himself.

"There, O'Grogan. Are you satisfied? That's what I felt when I read your book."

The boy smiled his gratitude; and one of the absurdest things of this interview, so he reflected, was his keen joy when Mr. Jamieson used the words, "*your* book."

In many ways the O'Grogan family was at its bravest blossoming now. Keatings had finished his career at Oxford, and though he had only by desperate efforts and the pushing of a crammer won his pass degree, he had intelligence and humour in his eyes and was considered by all—even by his sisters now—

to be a very presentable youth; Joyce had come of age in April and was beautiful, with her lively eyes, her lips ever parted for laughter, and her delightful curves at hip and thigh—which, to be sure, she often praised, calling them her “Ogee curves,” as a tribute to the O’Grogan family. Derek was still an undergraduate, but doing large things in the athletic world; Peggy was eighteen, less pretty than Joyce, but with some ogee curves of her own, and a grave-eyed sweetness too—the fruit of a division in her nature between her leanings towards the celibate life of a nun and her tendency to fall in love with any young man who would give her encouragement; and Tony had recently taken his senior scholarship at St. Paul’s.

And Dr. O’Grogan himself was in the highest fettle; he had this year been given his prebendal stall, and had immediately printed on his visiting cards “Canon O’Grogan,” though, strictly, he had a right only to the title “Prebendary;” he had received a record Easter offering and had consequently bowed to Joyce’s loud demand that this summer he took “the whole O’Grogan outfit” to Grandelmere; and he had hinted more than once that the imminent collapse of the Conservative Government (which came to pass in the following year) would brighten his chances of preferment. On Keatings’ seeking illumination, Canon O’Grogan expounded to the dinner table that a Conservative Government only advanced those clergy whose sympathies were well known to be Conservative, and a Liberal Government those who, like himself, had unwaveringly professed a Liberal creed. Peggy was much shocked at this, and her father acknowledged: “Yes, my dear, it oughtn’t to be so; but there it is! Your uncle, the Archdeacon, for example, owed more than one of his important livings to his well-known Conservative sympathies.”

“And will his eye be dished now?” demanded Keatings at once.

“Eye dished?” repeated Canon O’Grogan, seeking illumination in his turn.

“I mean, when the Liberals come in, will his chance of a bishopric be stollenboshed for another ten years or so?”

“I’m afraid so.”

“Well, the Lord be praised! That’s the best news I’ve heard for many a day. And he may die before the ten years are over.”

"Hush, Keatings," begged his mother. "There's many a true word spoken in jest."

"Is there? Good! And, Father: are your chances of getting a bishopric better now than Uncle's?"

The canon shrugged his shoulders, as much as to say: "It's not for me to express an opinion."

"Well, do get one before Uncle," Keatings pleaded. "That would fairly steam-roll the Gabriels flat."

In this condition of present success and happy hopes the O'Grogan family took train for Grandelmere. Seven of them, they filled a compartment. Or, rather, since the only two corner seats that looked over the passing landscape had been given to their parents, five of them, for most of the day, occupied the corridor. A tall young man, Keatings leaned his hinder parts against the walls of the compartment that his eyes might fall below the tops of the corridor windows; and when, every few minutes, he was obliged to lift these parts from their support and allow those people coming and going to pass behind him, he did it politely and with smiles, only making his unseemly jests when they were out of hearing. "Evidently travelling doesn't agree with them," he would murmur, as they turned the far corner of the corridor, and a door clicked; and Joyce, who was next to him, would say: "Keatings, you've got a sink of a mind!" Beyond Joyce was Derek, and beyond Derek, Peggy and Tony; because this family would arrange itself naturally in its order of age, or, as Keatings preferred it, in its order of merit.

During such times as they spent in the compartment, they would play two popular parlour games that Keatings had long ago invented. The first of them was "Flatulent Conversations;" and consisted in keeping up just such an interchange of vapid remarks as occurred over the teacups on their mother's "At Home" days; one "lost a life" if there were a glimmer of wit or intelligence in one's contribution.

"I like these summer days," began Keatings, "but it's a pity they draw in so now."

"Yes," admitted Joyce, "each is shorter now than the one before."

"Well, it can't be helped," said Derek, "one must expect winter after summer."

"Yes," said Peggy, "and the nearer we are to next winter, the nearer we are to next summer—really."

"Oh, *isn't* she an optimist?" Tony gushed; "but you're right, my dear; it's so much better to look on the bright side."

"It's characteristic of her unspoiled youth," said Keatings (for so often these games side-slipped into a bantering of Peggy).

"Winter has no terrors for the young like her," Joyce offered; "it'll be time enough for her to be cynical when she's old like me."

"Ah, it's good to be young!" sighed Derek.

"I hope," said Peggy, "that I shall keep young in heart, right up to the end."

"I wish it for you earnestly, my dear," said Tony, "but I pray God I may not meet you when you're like that." And there was a unanimous shout that he had lost a life, for he had said something quite intelligent.

Keatings began again. "How are all the children? They always look the picture of health?"

"I think it must be so nice to have children always about one," said Joyce; "because they keep you so young."

"Aye, but they be an expensive looxoory, that they be!" tried Derek.

"Yes," Peggy gushed, "but you wouldn't be without them, you know you wouldn't! The dear things!"

"Ah, but they grow up and leave one, and go their several ways," sighed Tony.

"Ah, yes!" sighed all.

The second game was the game of "No Conceit;" and its intent was to counterbalance any vanity in the Family's members, by a steady pressure on their palpable, and probably sensitive, weaknesses.

"Derek's nose is no longer this morning than it was yesterday—unfortunately—most unfortunately! It gives him such a pug-dog appearance."

"Pug dog! His face is more like an apple in a bad fruit year."

"Yes, and it deprives him of that *distingué* appearance which he secretly craves more than anything else."

"Well, one would have thought that Keatings could have got at least a *pass* degree without all that fuss."

"Pity Joyce's hair is not *naturally* curly. The horrid truth is revealed every time she bathes, when it's more like sea-weed than hair."

"And Peggy's mouth!" suggested Canon O'Grogan, joining in.

"Yes," Keatings groaned, "Oh, my God! Peggy's mouth!"

All groaned, and nodded despairing heads.

"It's so unpleasantly moist," Keatings pointed out, with offended nostrils. "God! it's awful."

And while they played the train was bearing them on to the vividest of all their summer holidays—the August at Grandelmere, when the O'Grogan family flourished in the world's face a brilliant and happy unity, before turning towards its failure and the first cracks of its dissolution. The train passed at one time through a storm of rain, and then on into sunlight; so that in the brightness of Grandelmere station it stood like a long street of cabins which had brought on its roofs the rain of an unkind world. On the platform in that fresher air, Dr. O'Grogan stood with his family about him. He could have had no knowledge then of the crack of disintegration that was coming, but Tony often wondered, in the later days when he loved to twist his mind round the uncompassable speculations of philosophy, whether a major event in a man's life, no matter how unforeseen it might be, could somehow be responsible for what happened before it in time. Reading the history, one might have assumed that Dr. O'Grogan, in his sadness before farewell, in his desire to give his children joy while such joy was possible, and in a plea to be remembered with kindness, had gathered them together in a lovely place and invested them with all the happiness he could buy. But perhaps it could not have been so; and certainly there was no shadow on his laughing face when he assembled his family on the station at Grandelmere.

At the hotel Tony rushed up a hundred stairs to the room which he would share with Derek, and found that it commanded a view of the lake. He leaned from the window, swept the view with his eyes, and expressed his emotion in a wordless outburst, "Derek! . . ."

The broad water lapped the gardens of the hotel; on its farther side were wooded hills, the pines, where they were hidden from the homeward sun, enclosing a pitchy darkness, and, where they caught its rays, glinting a rosy splash from every trunk; behind were loftier, bleaker hills, rolling into light and shadow; and the sky behind all was a silken back-cloth lit with a

primrose light. Tony stared at the treeless hills; these were the pastures where Gerda had kept her sheep.

The promise of pleasure hung over all that he could see. Floating against the garden's brink was the private bathing-stage of the hotel; farther along, where the main road ran, were moored the punts and skiffs and canoes; and farther still lay the pier from which the pleasure steamers started for Fowlhorn. Even now a couple of skiffs, each holding a youth in flannels and a girl in a white dress, were pulling to their moorings, their rowers hungry for dinner. Tony's throat went dry with anticipated delights. He turned from the window to dress for dinner; and this was the first of the delights.

On warm evenings dinner was served on the eastern end of the long veranda; and as the O'Grogan family was rather late in approaching a table, since every member had been unwilling this first night to leave the ante-room till the whole clan was assembled, it created a most pleasant stir among the diners; and well it might—this portly and striking clergyman, his distinguished if tired-looking wife, and his five handsome children. There was a flutter of turning faces, a marked stop in the conversation, and then a murmur of universal comment. Peggy blushed painfully; Tony felt to see if his tie was straight; Keatings whispered: "A success, children; a success! We've brought it off;" and Joyce admitted: "Yes, we're certainly getting over."

On their fourth night there was a dance after dinner; and Tony sat by the wall, because he was ashamed, and rightly, of his dancing. Keatings and Derek, proud rather than ashamed, were doing large things; Derek, in his oppressive conscientiousness, shaming the more selfish young men by deliberately selecting all the stout, unpartnered ladies to waltz or polka or barn-dance with him. Joyce and Peggy had partners for every number. And Mrs. O'Grogan said at last to Tony: "Why don't you dance! There's one little girl who'd make a lovely partner for you."

"Where?" inquired Tony, with no more interest than a slight offence at being offered a "little" girl.

"Look. She's coming this way."

It was a barn-dance; and a girl of about fifteen came by,

her hand in her father's. Dr. O'Grogan watched her smilingly and vowed, as became an Irishman, that she "handled her feet well;" but Tony gave her no second look. He had seen that her hair was dark, almost black, and tied at the nape of her neck by a green bow; that her green dress was short-skirted and simple as a schoolgirl's party frock; that her face was hot with the blushes of timidity; and that, altogether, she was horribly young. He preferred them fair, he said.

Not till the Lancers were announced was Tony impressed into the dancing. Then a perspiring and noisy Master of the Ceremonies seized him and led him towards the schoolgirl. "Here's your partner! Just the right size and age," shouted the fool, loud enough for half the room to hear. "Here you are. Joo know her? It's Sibyl. Sibyl Chandry. Doe-know your name. Consider yourselves introjooed." And he shot away to other doubting and inquiring couples.

Tony bowed and smiled to his partner, who looked shyly into his eyes and coloured. Her diffidence was revealed by her manner of turning her head and looking at her left shoulder and down her arm, as for words. The glance that she had given him stirred in Tony, to his surprise, a quick, almost painful response; for her face had all those soft lines and curves that could play along his heart-strings so familiar a refrain.

"That was a rather inadequate introduction," he opened. "My name's O'Grogan."

"Yes, I knew that," said the girl.

Tony sought desperately for words.

"'Sibyl' suits you," he found at last.

"Why?"

"Oh, I imagine a sibyl as someone rather dark, and all that. . . . I say, how old are you?"

"I was sixteen two months ago."

"Great Scott! You don't look it. You don't look much more than fourteen."

"No, I'm afraid I don't," she apologized.

"I suppose I ought to have said that my other name was Antony."

"Yes, I knew that, but I don't think Antony suits you a bit."

"Why?" asked Tony eagerly. The conversation had become quite interesting.

"Oh, because. . . . Well, I imagine——"

"*Now then, First Figure!*" shouted the Master of the Ceremonies. "Come on, the music! Now then, all of you. . . . No, that's not right. *You* and *you* advance and retire—and then both hands. . . . No, that's all wrong"—he had charged away to the rescue of another group—"No, turn her with both hands and retire. . . . Yes, that's it. . . . Now, Second Lady and First Gentleman. . . . Oh, wait"—he was off to disentangle the hopeless, shrieking, laughing confusion of a neighbouring set. "*That's* right. *You* and you—and *you* and you. . . . Repeat. . . . Yes, now you two." He pushed them round, and the first figure, it seemed, was complete. The music stopped, and all clapped heartily their own failure.

"You were going to tell me," Tony resumed, "what was wrong with my Christian name."

"It's just not my idea of you, that's all."

"Well, what's your idea of me?"

"You ought to have something that's really Irish: Patrick or Michael——"

"Blazes! *Why?*"

"Well, I—I——"

"*Second Figure,*" shouted the M. C. "Come on! First couples advance. . . . Yes, *and* again. That's right. Perfectly simple. No, no, no, no, *NO!* You've got it all wrong. Lem-me!"

"Confound the man!" muttered Tony. "Dreadfully silly dance, this, isn't it?"

"No, I like it."

"Oh, sorry! But you were going to tell me why I ought to——"

"*Now then:* all turn your partners round," shouted the M. C. "Don't stand talking there. No time for a *conversazione*. Swingeround!" and Tony flung Sibyl round.

"You haven't told me where you live," he said, when they paused again.

"In India. At least, that's where I'm going to live from now onwards. Isn't it lovely?"

"I should imagine so. Tell me all about it."

"I can't remember anything about it. I was born there. . . . Daddy's in the Indian Army, you see."

"And you were sent home?"

"Yes, I was sent home when I was three. But Daddy always promised me he would take me back with him when I was

sixteen. So this is our last bit of England before we go. That's why we came to this gorgeous place. Isn't it too perfectly thrilling?"

"Not bad. . . . Well, go on about India." He had to encourage her talk which else would droop away from him.

"I've been learning riding at school and in the holidays, because I'm to have my own ponies. I can ride almost anything now."

"How long will you stop out there?"

"Most of my life, I suppose."

"Won't you miss a lot of things?"

"What things?"

"Friendships and—and people—and——"

"But there are plenty of English out there."

"Yes, but they are always the same."

Now Sibyl looked away again, seeking down her arm for words. And when she did reply it was to lift her face and say a strange thing:

"I think one is bound to be lonely wherever one is, don't you?"

The next figure of the Lancers took her from him; and Tony, whose interest in her had been mightily heightened by the strange sentence, had no opportunity of returning to it till the dance's close. But then he invited crudely: "Here. Come and sit on the veranda a bit. I want to know what on earth you meant by what you said just now about being lonely. It rather interests me."

He led her to two wicker chairs on the veranda, and felt a certain pleasure in helping to arrange her comfortably in one of them. After which he pulled up the knees of his trousers, sat down, and laid one leg across the other that he might massage its black silk ankle and fiddle with the heel of its patent-leather shoe.

"What did you mean?" he asked.

"Well, you see . . . one never . . ." Sibyl faltered, her eyes straying to the left, "one never gets out of anybody quite what one wants—does one?"

"Extraordinary that you should say that," mused Tony aloud. "I was reading a book the other day, but I don't suppose you're likely to have read it——"

"You don't mean——" She had come quickly to life, and sat forward eagerly as she mentioned its name.

"Yes, I do, by Jove!"

"Oh, don't talk of it—don't talk of it!" said Sibyl. "It's the loveliest book I've read, but it's too—it's too unbearable. I can't get it out of my head. I read it just before we came here, because it was all about the lake."

"What made it appeal to you so?"

"A story must appeal to you when you see yourself in it, mustn't it?"

Her answer had come along her confiding, upward glance, and Tony met for a second her dark eyes that instantly flew away. The familiar blend of delight and pain was now active at his heart—and more insistently than it had ever been, at a first meeting.

"Yes, by Jove, you are like Gerda," he said.

"Oh, tell me you liked the book, too," Sibyl besought. "You did, didn't you?"

"I thought," Tony expounded, picking at the heel of his patent-leather shoe, "I thought that in its small way it was a very lovely piece of work. It's thin, of course, but then . . . so is gossamer . . . and so is the wing of a dragon-fly."

"Yes," Sibyl nodded, as soon as she understood.

"And I think I got the feeling," pursued Tony, "that the author, whoever he was, had done a bigger thing than he knew. What I mean is, he was not really a conscious creator so much as a passive instrument on which something outside him—larger than him—had played. Like a harp, whose strings have caught the wind outside it and have given forth a true chord . . . to which we all listen in a dumb, answering pain. D'you see what I mean?"

"I think so. I think I understand."

"But mind you," Tony added, "mind you, I reckon it was written by someone very young."

The best hour for the growth of a love is just after the lady who has stirred us is lost to sight, and we are recreating her picture in memory. Tony walked away from the door at which he had said good night, and sought the veranda where he might lean on the balustrade and gaze down at the lake or up at the dark mass of the opposite hills. He suspected that he had crossed the threshold of an exciting happiness. He was

thinking especially of that moment, when, leading Sibyl to the last waltz after their talk on the veranda, he had suddenly remembered his words to Raking that the touch of no girl would stir him unless he loved her mind; and he had wondered, as he pushed open the ball-room door for her, if his holding of her waist and her hand would now delight him. And he had found it extraordinarily sweet to be enclasping her thus—so much so that its memory could send a thrill through his body. Oh, was he falling in love with Sibyl; was brilliance coming back into his life? Why, just to imagine this so desirable thing was to know that he must go forward and make it a reality.

And with Sibyl it would be different from—from the others. He would be able to possess her adoring mind as he had never possessed theirs; he would get back from her what he was giving; surely her eager silences as he talked had shown that! O Sibyl, you lovely creature! To have your adoration! . . . Of course they would never speak of it to each other, because it was not in either of them to flirt; their talk would be of their schools, their homes, their hobbies, and their ambitions for the future; but each would know the other's thoughts, and be happy in the knowledge. His parents and Major and Mrs. Chandry, and the people in the hotel would suspect no more than a holiday friendship; they would never see it as love, for that would seem too utterly ridiculous. From beginning to end it would be the unspoken secret of himself and Sibyl.

Tony did not know that, before the end, a visitor was coming to the Grandelmere Hotel, who could penetrate to his secrets.

CHAPTER IV

MRS. EDEN WATCHING

THE hotel guests, sitting at the dinner tables on the veranda, saw in Mrs. Eden—as she walked to her place, followed by her husband—a tall, enlarging, well-dressed woman with soft, humorous eyes and hair silvering too soon. They judged her to be forty-eight or fifty.

Mrs. Eden, as she sat down and, lifting the inviolate table-napkin, glanced along the veranda with its chain of dining tables, was thinking thus: The first evening of a holiday is perhaps the best of all your thirty evenings. You see and measure the people whom you will meet for the next few weeks, and they see you in the dress to which—as always for a first appearance among strangers—you have given especial care. Before you stretches a month of such leisured careful dressing, with meals and service, like the glacial halls and marble staircases, at several points above your normal. It is a sensation that flatters and cozens you, but one to which every holiday-maker should rightly succumb. It's just a period of life more gaily dyed.

Evidently Mr. Eden, her husband, was thinking the same, for he expressed it with a merry rawness: "This is a bit of all right, Agnes," and clapped and rubbed his hands. She could almost have predicted the words and the action, her husband being a fairly prosperous, and therefore inarticulate, stock-broker, whose honest round body was more happily tailored than his mind; and such a manner of expressing his exalted moment would have been the artless poetry of ninety and nine of his breed.

"Fancy it being August," said he, spreading his table napkin. "It's nearly as warm as Hell. *Ab!*" This was the Wine List.

"Yes," answered Mrs. Eden, gazing through a glass screen at the lake. "There's a lot to be said for an August that lets

you sit on a terrace and eat your dinner by the last light of the sun."

"Yes," Mr. Eden agreed. "What shall we have?"

His wife lightly shrugged her shoulders. "I wish I were a real connoisseur in wines. There ought to be a wine that matches this scene—the hills, and the dense pines and the afterglow on the water. I'm sure there ought."

"Yes," Mr. Eden answered doubtfully. "Well, what's it to be?"

"Choose yourself, dear. It's something more tranquil than champagne, I think."

"H'm, but champagne's a good word—an encouraging word—oh, my Lord, yes! Agnes, an inspiring word. . . ." His refrain dwindled into the column of champagnes.

Over her soup, Mrs. Eden gazed unobtrusively at as many of the visitors as were within reach of her eyes. She had looked forward to this. At the next table was a middle-aged lady, without a companion and plainly expecting none, for there was an open novel by her plate. Mrs. Eden leaned back to get a glimpse of the book's title, in the hope that it might be one particular book, but alas! it was not. The table beyond was possessed by a family of seven—a good-looking, white-haired clergyman, his handsome but sad-faced wife, two young men, two young girls, and a schoolboy. She judged the father to be a Canon at least, and placed the schoolboy at Cheltenham or Harrow—a nice youth with fair hair laboriously brushed with brilliantine, and a dinner jacket as neat as his father's. From where she sat she could see his feet curled round the legs of his chair, and remarked the black silk socks and the brand-new pumps.

"I've found one nice family, at any rate," she murmured to her husband.

The people at the table beyond, to whom the whole family was now talking, were a family of three—a father and mother out of the same mould, and a schoolgirl daughter. The school-girl seemed no more than fourteen. Her dress was a simple affair of green silk, and she wore neither necklace nor bracelet. Her black hair was tied at the nape of the neck, and her eyes gazed about with simplicity, as if this were her first visit to a spot of quite such beauty, and she had not long been accustomed to eating dinners and drinking red wine on a veranda.

"I shall certainly get to know them," Mrs. Eden announced.

It was pleasant to watch the chaff and the teasing that was being tossed between the tables of the two families. "They are the only two children here."

"Who?" inquired her husband.

"The nice boy two tables away, and a fourteen-year-old beauty three tables away. I'm sorry there are no others. You want children about at an hotel to make you feel it's a holiday place."

"I don't know." Mr. Eden was doubtful. "I don't know so much about that. They're generally noisy and rush about."

With pauses between the courses, and silences between the conversations, the dinner floated by; and after the fruit the tables, one by one, emptied themselves of their sitters, the men taking their smokes to the other end of the veranda. As Mrs. Eden expected, the chairs of the two tables that particularly interested her, were simultaneously pushed back and both families rose. The boy stood aside to let his parents and his brothers and sisters pass, and the girl stood aside to let—no, Mrs. Eden was more than ever interested—the girl, conceal it how she might, stood back to wait for the boy. She had done it diffidently, covering her delay by playing with something on the table. Just that—she had lingered. And by the manner in which the two walked away together, behind their chattering relatives, the girl looking at the windows of the billiard rooms rather than at her companion, and the boy staring ahead and keeping his hands in his pockets to affect a spurious self-possession, Mrs. Eden knew everything.

"They're in love."

"Who are?" queried her husband, selecting a cigar.

"That boy and girl."

"Don't be romantic." His head swung round to examine them. "Two whipper-snappers aren't in love because they walk away together."

"Oh, but these two are—I am sure of it. Not by their walking away together, but by their manner of walking, and by the exorbitant care the boy has given to his dress. There's not a speck of dust on his trousers, his pumps are like black glass, and his hair is plastered down—which is stupid enough, because I should say it was pretty hair. And *she*—she didn't do her hair in fifteen minutes. And then he finds it difficult to look at her, lest she catches him at it; and she looks

anywhere but at him—but quite often at their reflection in the windows.”

Mr. Eden’s cigar was now alight, and his body turned comfortably round that he might face towards the moving people.

“Anything more you know about them?”

“Yes, both families have been here some time.”

“How do you get that?”

“Why, the people in the wicker chairs are not in the least interested in them. When you and I pass those chairs, every head will turn and follow us along the veranda.”

“Anything else?”

“Yes; I’m afraid—I’m very much afraid that the exceedingly good-looking parson ill-treats his wife.”

“Damn, no! Parsons don’t do that. Not allowed to.”

“Oh, I don’t mean that he knocks her down, but that he treats her with the utmost courtesy and indifference; which is the well-bred form of cruelty and desertion—isn’t it? And now I’ve said something that sounds like a good thing, let’s go before we drop to lower levels.”

She pushed back her chair, and her husband did likewise. “Yes, we’re almost the last at the tables,” he said. “Looks bad.” He tossed down the napkin with which he had dusted his front, and he and his wife strolled along the veranda, seeking a couple of chairs. Being late-comers, they had to walk far. They passed the piano and the chairs of the musicians. They passed the boy’s parents and the girl’s parents sitting together. They passed the clergyman’s two elder sons, and his two daughters, all apparently rejoicing in a heated and humorous quarrel. They passed other people less recognizable, and still they found no chairs. They passed round the corner of the hotel and on to the deserted side-veranda, hoping that there might be chairs here which they could carry to the front. But suddenly Mrs. Eden whispered:

“If you’re a sport, Peter, look straight ahead and mutter your usual, ‘There are no damn chairs,’ and then let’s turn gracefully to the right-about. We’re being a nuisance.”

A glance at one of the recesses formed by the side bay-windows had shown her the boy and the girl seated—not very close to each other—in wicker chairs. The boy was lolling back, and the one leg that was thrown over the other was gently swinging its foot and showing the most of his silk sock. The girl was on his left, sitting almost sideways as she talked to him,

her elbows on the chair-arm, her chin in the cup of her hand, and her legs bent under the seat.

"No," said Mrs. Eden, on second thoughts, "come away and don't mumble anything about damn chairs, or that boy'll certainly get up and offer us his."

"Well, why shouldn't he?"

Just then the quartette opened its programme with a vigorous march.

"Why? Why, a man who would disturb an idyll like that would—would——" they were now round the corner again and could see the musicians throwing their first energies into the march—"I can't think of a sufficiently crushing simile—would prick a bubble all opalescence and mystery one tenth of a second before it must necessarily burst."

As they returned, they saw that the chairs beside the boy's parents were now free, the girl's parents having gone within; and Mrs. Eden was quick to inquire: "Are you keeping these seats?"

The clergyman smiled politely. "No, no; take them, take them." He might have been smiling them into a private pew at his church.

And so an intimacy began. Mrs. Eden learned that her new friends were Canon and Mrs. O'Grogan, that they had been at the hotel three weeks and were staying another two, and that all wise people should go on the excursion to Stagwater across the lake, and to Red Dale in the opposite hills. The conversation continued during intervals between the music and sometimes, it is to be feared, during the music too, after which they offered perfunctory applause as an apology for this forgetfulness. And soon Mrs. Eden turned the conversation to the subject of Canon O'Grogan's youngest boy.

"Oh, Tony, you mean," said the father. "Yes, Tony's a good old fellow."

The words, though affectionate, seemed inadequate.

"I suppose he's still at school."

"Yes, he's only sixteen or so. He's at St. Paul's. And not doing too badly there."

"And who's the little beauty he goes about with?"

"Little Sibyl Chandry. You haven't met Major and Mrs. Chandry, have you? Indian Army people. Yes, I like Sibyl, and I'm glad she's here to amuse old Tony. In fact, there's no one else of quite his age in the place. They don't bring many

children to a place like this, do they? I was afraid old Tony might be bored, but he and Sibyl seem to have amused each other."

Again Mrs. Eden wondered why the words were too prosaic to harmonize with her thoughts; she was reminded of a faint disappointment she took last summer when her husband described as "this old waterfall" one of those cascades above Stagwater on which the sun was casting pale, concentric rainbows. But then: an "old waterfall" was exactly what, in simple fact, it was. Anything more was given to it by the observer's eyes...

Canon and Mrs. O'Grogan were moving. It was dark now; and the warm air was interfused with cold, and the lights had gone up in the billiard rooms, and the balls were clicking and the glasses clinking, and the veranda, though the quartette was still playing, had begun to lose its people.

Next morning, when the sun was hot upon the lake, Mrs. Eden contented herself with sitting upon the veranda in one of the wicker chairs. On her lap were the scribbled sheets of a story she was struggling to build—but in discouragement and with fading purpose. For long months past she had been beating up against frustration; and this morning she seemed to know that she would write no more. Not even these lakes and hills which she so much loved would quicken an inspiration that was spent. Why the story of Gerda had visited her, and how she could have written it, who knew so little of the author's craft, and why, when she wrote it, she had trembled with an agitating conviction that it was true and good, must ever be something of a mystery to her. It had just been a pleasing and mastering day-dream that she had put upon paper, easily and without fret. And now her publishers were asking for a successor to Gerda, and she knew she had no more to give. Her return to Grandelmere in search of a second inspiration was a fond, vain step. Best know it, and rest, and turn from the writing of that which was bad to the reading of that which was good. She put the scribbled sheets on the table at her side, and took up her Wordsworth.

But she did not read for long, because the sound of voices down by the water's edge drew her eyes that way. It was Tony O'Grogan and Sibyl Chandry. They were standing in buff

mackintoshes and bare legs, on the little bathing platform. From their laughter Mrs. Eden guessed that they were quarrelling who should enter the water first; and, fittingly, Tony threw off his mackintosh, poised on his toes, and took a header into the lake. Sibyl also discarded her mackintosh, but, lacking this strength of will, stood with her arms, for warmth's sake, folded across her breast, the hands grasping the bare shoulders. Her costume was a dark blue skin-tight costume like a man's, and Mrs. Eden had time to notice how her figure and limbs were just beginning to fill with maturity, before Sibyl, with a shriek of mixed amusement and apprehension, leapt into the water after Tony. Both could swim, the boy the better of the two, and anyone could see that, like a young cock-bird, he was displaying his over-arm stroke, his somersaulting, and his kick-churning for the admiration of his companion. Time and again he clambered on to the platform and dived over or under Sibyl, while she shrieked and laughed. Their voices seemed the only sound on the water or between the hills. When they both swarmed out on to the hard planks of the jetty, bringing costumes that were dark and shining with wet like the skins of seals, they lay supine in the sun, their hands behind their heads. On the weathered wood their limbs lay white.

But probably the sky dazzled their eyes, for they rose on their elbows and then sat with crossed calves, tailor-wise. Once Sibyl threw her legs straight before her and, placing her palms on the boards behind her, leaned back that the sun might beat on her breast. That Tony suggested diving in again was made clear by a quick, enthusiastic turn of his head, and that Sibyl repelled the unpleasant idea by a shiver of her shoulders. And then they stood up, put on their buff waterproofs, and leaving the jetty for the hotel, were lost to the watcher's view.

Mrs. Eden had read many pages of her book and passed away an hour before she wearied. It fell then to her lap; and she abandoned herself to idle staring across the water at the dense trees climbing the opposite hill. It was noon: the sun, high above the veranda, was exactly in front of the hotel, its light spread brilliantly over the face of the lake. This reflection on a water filmed with calm was so wide and dazzling that a little pleasure-skiff which had come from the hirer's stance near the pier and was about to cross it, seemed lost in an enchanted sea of stillness and light. The boat moved soundlessly. It was rowed by a man or a youth in tennis flannels and hatless; and

in the stern a girl in a white dress held the rudder-lines. Tony O'Grogan and Sibyl Chandry. No voice could be heard at this distance, and, so far as could be seen, Sibyl was not moving at all, while Tony's rhythmic motion was a thing so regular as to be near to stillness. The boat passed on towards the east, diminishing and growing indistinct, till at last it rounded a little cape of trees.

Mrs. Eden remained thinking, wishing the boat would appear again. But it did not, and she relapsed into her book. Her interest revived, and it was not till lunch time that she was disturbed by voices and hurrying steps. Tony and Sibyl had returned from their row. Not knowing her, they would have passed, but she acted on an impulse and asked the boy with a friendly smile :

"Well, did you have a nice row?"

"Yes . . . thank you . . . topping! We're going out again after lunch. Over to that village, Broadhaven. We shall have tea there and bathe."

"But you've bathed once already."

"Exactly!"

"Won't you introduce your friend?"

The boy blushed. "Yes. Sibyl, *here!* This is Sibyl Chandry. I—I don't know your name."

"Mrs. Eden. I only arrived last night. But you've been here quite a while."

It was Sibyl who answered.

"Yes, worse luck! To-morrow's my last day. We go the day after—to India! It's horrible!"

"Horrible, going to India?"

"Oh, no. Horrible leaving here quite so soon."

"You've enjoyed yourself, then?"

"Oh, *rather!* I've never had such a perfect time in my life. I don't want to go a bit."

And the boy interrupted: "Oh, don't let's talk about it. You'll have all day to-day and all to-morrow."

Mrs. Eden, while he was speaking, had noticed his dress. His flannel trousers were pressed to a fine crease, his shirt was opened with a premeditated negligence at the throat, and his hair was as faultless as when he was in evening dress.

"I think I must go and get ready for lunch," said Sibyl.

"Righto!" permitted Tony; and she went.

"You can't say that *you* need to go, Mr. Tony," laughed

Mrs. Eden. "I've never seen anyone so tidy in my life. Sit down, won't you?"

He took the chair next to her, perhaps a trifle embarrassed. The obvious thing for Mrs. Eden to do, if he were to be made at ease, was to set him talking about Sibyl, so she began:

"That's a beautiful girl." (She had been going to say "little girl," but her wisdom saved her.)

"Who? Oh, Sibyl. Yes, she's rather jolly. We—we've got an awful lot of interests in common. . . . Isn't it rotten, the way you meet a lot of nice people on a holiday, and get to know them and like them, and in a week or two it's all over, and you never see them again? You may think you will, but you never do, do you?"

"Oh, yes, sometimes."

The boy smiled and shook his head. "No, I don't think so. People just go out of your life. One never sees them again. One never does—really. . . . Especially when . . ."

"Especially when what?"

"Oh, I was just thinking of the Chandrys as an example. We've all got to like them hugely. Major Chandry's one of the best, and so is Mrs. Chandry. And they're going to *India*."

"Perhaps you'll go to India one day, and meet them there."

"No. One may imagine oneself doing these things, but one doesn't do them—really."

Knowing that he would be happiest if he spoke of Sibyl, Mrs. Eden repeated:

"Well, I think she's perfectly lovely."

"Who?"

"Your friend, Sibyl."

"Is she? Yes, I suppose she *is* pretty." If a person is spoken of admiringly, one's natural instinct is to exhibit any proprietary rights one may have in her, and the boy continued: "Yes, we always sit out and talk after dinner. We've done it every evening, so that it's become quite an institution."

That minute Sibyl appeared out of a distant doorway, ready for lunch. Observing that Tony was sitting with Mrs. Eden, she pretended not to have seen him, and, walking to the rail of the veranda, leaned her hands upon its top and looked down upon the gardens below. That Tony saw her was plain to Mrs. Eden; but his manners were too good to allow him to jump up at once, and he sat on abstractedly.

"Well, I must be getting ready for lunch," said she. "Good-bye for the present."

He stood up and opened a door for her, and she walked across the lounge to the lift, which raised her to her bedroom floor. In the bedroom was her husband, brushing his hair.

"That's a perfectly delightful little romance, Peter," she reported.

"What romance?"

"The boy and the girl."

"Oh, that young fool! There are always buckets-full of these budding romances at holiday hotels. I suppose he's making himself ridiculous."

But his wife shook her head.

"I don't find him ridiculous, somehow."

She was careful to be in her place on the veranda that afternoon, so as to see Tony's skiff pass along the lake, as he took Sibyl to her tea at Broadhaven. And since she was impatient for its coming, the time seemed strangely long before she saw it soundlessly moving over the water, as it had done in the morning. It was at a greater distance from her, and the two white figures, one in the stern and the other rhythmically rowing, were two white specks.

"You have all this afternoon, and all to-morrow," she thought, "and then comes the day after."

For a long while she sat there; the tea-hour came and passed; the disk of the sun sank low on her right, and its far-flung rays laid a golden light on the water and touched the ruddy bark of the pines with fire. The opposite hills turned to indigo, as it went down behind them and drew home its light. She was thinking of the calf-loves in her own youth, and of one especially—those six weeks in Thanet when she had loved Norman. Norman! The name moved her lips to smile. He was Norman to her still, a self-conscious little dandy of sixteen. Thirty-five years ago! They had walked together of summer nights, eating chocolates round the band-stand. There had been much less beauty there than here to trouble them with the need of love; a meretricious beauty it had been—illuminations and carpet gardens and a red-coated band playing light, machine-made melodies. No broad and shadowed lake,

reflecting the sun in its centre and pine hills under either bank ; none of this waiting stillness of Grandelmere. And yet that day ! That day before he had to go, when she had told herself, "I shall never see him again. I know I shan't. One never does." And she had not—in thirty-five years. Nor had they written, for both had been too shy to use a word like "love" and to exact promises in its name. Perhaps that had been as well, saving them from humiliation when letters flagged and failed. And Time had mended all, sure enough ; and it had only required a few weeks of time. That, she supposed, was what made it funny. And yet . . . as she looked at the bare hills rolling behind the more trivial garnishings of valley and lake, her thoughts played less with humour than with those strange, eternal things that sometimes break through upon our earthly business.

Too quickly passed to-morrow, and in the evening, Mrs. Eden treated herself to but one glimpse of Tony and Sibyl, where, perfectly dressed, they sat on the wicker chairs, isolated round the corner of the veranda. They were still not close to each other, and she knew that Tony would be too diffident and awkward to offer Sibyl anything but the words of a friend.

The Chandrys would be leaving, so Major and Mrs. Chandry told her that night, by to-morrow's three o'clock boat for Fowlhorn. She could have wished they were going earlier, so saving Tony a morning of dull sadness between breakfast and lunch.

And at three o'clock the next afternoon, Mrs. Eden, resolved to watch the end, was sitting in her place on the veranda, from which she could see the pier and the boat. She had heard Tony's light and laughing shout to Mrs. Chandry, "I'll come and see you people off all right ;" she had listened while Canon O'Grogan said : "Old Tony's actually refused to come on the excursion to-morrow, just so that he can see you off. Isn't that devotion ?" and now, from her chair set along the veranda rail, she saw the boy, in his white flannels and grey jacket, standing near the luggage on the pier and watching the crowd of passengers as it funnelled up the gangway. On the first-class deck stood Sibyl, in a wide Leghorn hat and a long fawn coat, pretending to talk and laugh suitably.

The siren sounded, and Mrs. Eden exclaimed at its brutality.

Now the luggage was being carried aboard, and Tony was standing with his hands in his pockets, watching the porters. He stood alone, but on the other side of the gangway was a crowd of blithe souls, paying their last tribute to the intimacies of a holiday, with cheers and choruses and aped lamentations. Again the siren boomed. Tony brought one hand from his pocket in readiness to wave.

But the ropes were not yet cast back to the boat, and his hand returned to his pocket. He was no longer looking up at the Chandrys on their deck, but, as if impatient for the ship to be gone, studying a time-table placed on a pier notice-board. Once he pulled out his watch and looked at it. At last the boat began to move away, while the crowd on the pier, amid laughter and cheers, sang "Auld Lang Syne." Tony, standing aloof, waved a hand. Sibyl was waving hers—and so was Mrs. Chandry, for all the world as if her waves had a value equal to her daughter's. About Tony's hand-wave there was nothing fervent; it was awkward and sufficiently full of effort to show his embarrassment with a courtesy so long drawn out. Doubtless he wished the boat could go quickly round the bend, like a train. Still, it was well under way, and fast diminishing. Tony walked towards the entrance of the little pier, then turned and waved again, in case he could still be seen. But the boat was beyond the throw of any signal, so he turned about, put his hands in his pockets, and climbed the hill to the hotel.

Immediately it broke upon Mrs. Eden that he would come on to the empty veranda to stare over the lake. "He'll want to stare at the bathing platform, and the pleasure skiffs—one particularly—and at Broadhaven yonder;" and quickly she shut her book, rose from her chair, and disappeared into the hotel.

During dinner that evening she watched again. Tony was talking merrily to his brothers and sisters at their table, though at times he sank into remoteness. Once he joined in the conversation with some new guests who had taken over the table of the Chandrys. *That* table! When the meal was finished and the chairs pushed back, he strolled jokingly along with the others, and sat with them in the wicker chairs. But after a while he got up and went to the veranda rail, on which he rested his hand, while he curled a foot behind a heel. Mrs. Eden, by this time, was sitting with her husband in a chair not very far away; she could hear the muted but merry tune which the boy was whistling to himself. Studying him again—his

hair as laboriously brushed, his tie as neat as yesterday, and his pumps like black glass—she found herself thinking: “I wonder if he got any pleasure in dressing to-night.”

Now he was leaning forward to pick a stalk from an up-reaching clematis, which he might put in his mouth and leave to droop there, like a cigarette. And suddenly it trembled as if his teeth had set; to which quick grimace Mrs. Eden fitted her own words: “One never sees them again . . . one never does. . . .”

Well, there it was. A little of love, not much, but a sip of the dreadful cup, a prick of the sword that should one day pierce deep, a wounding touch of beauty as it passed, fugitive.

Mr. Eden spoke. “Awful little coxcomb, isn’t he?”

“Oh, don’t,” begged his wife, “please, *please!*”

“*He’ll* be all right in a week or two. A few good games of Rugger’ll knock all that nonsense out of him.”

“Of course they will,” Mrs. Eden allowed, lifting her rope of pearls and examining it contemplatively. “Of course they will—but why laugh at him now?”

“Because it’s the healthiest thing to do. One should always laugh at folly as it flies.”

“That’s only a glib chain of words, Peter. I could make as good a phrase. ‘Why laugh at pain as it passes?’ Or, better still, ‘Why not keep silence while beauty is passing by?’”

This was enough to bring Mr. Eden’s head abruptly towards her. “You have it badly to-night, my dear,” he said.

“Yes, perhaps I have. It’s another wonderful night, isn’t it, and such a wonderful spot, this.”

Lights flared up behind them in billiard-room and lounge. They heard the fall and click of the billiard balls as they were decanted on the tables, and a clink of glasses at the bar, and men’s voices. Mrs. Eden’s head moved resentfully, as at the return of something from which she had escaped.

“Well,” said her husband, “I’m going to have a game. Will you come and watch?”

“Not just yet, my dear.”

“Well . . . see you later.”

“Yes. Very soon.”

CHAPTER V

THE DETONATION

IT was a Saturday afternoon in November. Tony was returning home from St. Paul's after playing in the Second XV against Merchant Taylors. He was exhilarated in mind and body. This was the first time he had been given a trial in the School Second, and he had borne himself not without distinction and applause in the conspicuous and dramatic rôle of scrum-half. Granted he had not scored a "try," which had been his secret ambition throughout a nervous morning, but he had more than once opened up the game for his three-quarters with a trembling quickness, and been the prime mover in the tries scored by other men. Congratulations had been tossed to him, when in the Baths the two teams were washing their feet or crowding under the showers. And he had overheard with averted face other comments on his success.

Now, excited and fatigued, he walked up the Hammersmith Road, with a stiffness registering along his limbs but only heightening the glow of fitness that tingled in his veins. The aching bruise on his thigh where he had been heavily thrown, the stinging cut in his left knee, the dry thirstiness in his throat, and the resultant tendency to cough—these were not centres of radiating depression but focuses that captured the consciousness of health. Fatigue after work done; fatigue and relaxation and thirst—few higher ecstasies are possible to men. Now for hot tea, and a loaf of new bread, and a dish of butter. Not cake: cake was too sickly-sweet for such an appetite as his. Tea, tea; and the whole top of a cottage loaf; and the yellow butter; and a knife to spread it, and jab in the dish, and spread, and come again.

He pushed open the Vicarage door and threw down his kit-bag beside the hat-stand, as was the custom of the house. For a dozen years now the entrance hall of the Vicarage, with its tennis

rackets, golf-clubs, cricket bats, last season's hockey sticks, and, maybe, Joyce's white canvas shoes, had looked more like the Sports Department at Gamages than the vestibule to the audience chamber of the Parish Priest; and over all these implements of play beamed the unheeded text: "GOD IS THE MASTER OF THIS HOUSE." Tony gave a glance at his face in the hat-stand mirror, and saw that his hair was moist and untidy, his eyes alight, his colour high, and his cheeks hollowed by fatigue.

Then Joyce put her face out of the breakfast-room door—a frightened face—and took it back again, to say to the people in the room: "Yes, it's him." A chair was pushed back and Keatings came into the hall.

"I say, Tony," he began, quietly. "You'd better come in here. We're—there's a Family pow-wow in progress."

Like a barometer Tony responded instantly to the lowered pressure of the atmosphere. He did not know whether an uncomfortable alarm or a pleasant thrill was his uppermost sensation. And ashamed of either, he affected its opposite: a complete unconcern.

"Hang, no! I'm hungry. It's not important, is it?"

"About as important as anything can be."

"My eye! What the devil's up?"

But Keatings had returned into the breakfast-room. Tony, straightening his hair with his palm as if in respect for this sudden solemnity, followed. Besides Keatings and Joyce, Derek and Peggy were in the room. Keatings, with hands in pockets, was walking slowly up and down; Joyce was seated disconsolately on the edge of the big mahogany table; Derek was standing importantly on the fender, as might a Chairman of the Board; and Peggy, with wide, absent eyes, stood by the plush curtain, gazing at the tarnished November garden.

"You look glum enough!" laughed Tony. "Is there a death in the family? Or have the Gabriels done something big again?"

"Cor——!" muttered Keatings. "Don't mention the Gabriels. I had forgotten them."

"The Gabriels!" repeated Joyce. "Why didn't they all die first?"

And she lifted her eyes from the ground to stare at the ceiling, and Tony saw that they were wet; saw also how beautiful they were. Her lips were trembling.

"Joyce!" he asked. "What's the matter?"

"It's horrid," she answered. "... horrid. . . ."

Keatings spoke; perhaps deriving a small, compensatory pleasure from the masculine directness with which he stated the facts. "Father went abroad this morning with a woman—a married woman—leaving a letter for mother and a letter for me, and writing to the Bishop. He's—er—gone for good . . . you understand."

Tony stared at his brother without speech; all words stayed, heavy and immobile, on the dark river-bed of his thoughts.

"It seems there has been some sort of connexion between them for some time," pursued Keatings, "but the husband has only just discovered; he's a vulgarian, and he's made public his vow to institute divorce proceedings. And Father's not going to—Father's not going to defend the case; and what's more, he's sworn to acknowledge and protect the child that's on the way."

"Good God!" muttered Tony.

"Pretty awful, isn't it?" said Derek, from the fender.

"Who is it? Who is the woman?"

"Mrs. Blayre, the wife of the vet. in Thomas Street."

"He didn't even choose a lady to disgrace himself with," said Derek.

"Oh, you shut up, Derek," snapped Keatings. "Your contributions are neither pleasant nor helpful. . . . And Father's just flown before the storm, and left us all. I suppose we shall ever see him again."

"I sincerely hope we never shall," added Derek.

"Shut up, Derek, I tell you! You're too infernally righteous. Other men have done this sort of thing before; and probably the only thing that'll keep you from doing it yourself will be your confounded interest in your own career and your own reputation. I daresay you'd do it fast enough, if you thought it a help instead of a hindrance."

"That may be," Derek allowed, with precisely the note that had accompanied the "Had on!" of his childhood; "but I shan't be preaching purity every Sunday morning, and pronouncing absolution, and knowing all the time that I've got a baby coming by someone else's wife."

"Oh, don't . . ." pleaded Joyce "... it's horrid . . . horrid."

"And I shan't leave a wife and five children in the lurch. If I'm fool enough to marry, I shall stand by my obligations."

"Father had to choose which obligations he would accept, as he says in his letter to me. And he chose to stand by a woman who would otherwise be completely left, and by a—a child. He says we're old enough to stand on our own feet and care for one another, and for mother. Under the circumstances I don't feel at all sure that he chose wrong."

"Oh, Father *would* cover his choice with fine words and phrases. He's a dab at that," suggested Derek. "They don't deceive me. A common elopement with another man's wife is a common piece of self-indulgence and no more."

"It isn't as simple as that," Keatings denied. "Just think a bit, if you can. . . . Father must have had a pretty awful time when he knew that he was found out and that the fat would have to go into the fire."

And now Peggy spoke for the first time. From her place by the window she whispered: "Of course."

"And, honestly," Keatings continued, "I believe in much of his letter. He finds the best words to justify himself, no doubt, but—I don't believe he's been wholly bad in his choice. I don't . . . somehow."

And Peggy whispered again: "Of course not."

All this while Tony had been sitting on the arm of a chair and staring round the room. To him, everything in the room had put on, like an unwelcome garment, a heavy significance it had never expected to wear: the time-piece presented by the congregation, the family photographs on the mantel-shelf in their plush and silver frames, the pious Doré pictures, the arm-chair that had so often held his father, his ash tray, and, saddest of all, perhaps, the vase of flowers that stood in the centre of the table to give the room good cheer.

"It must have been a hell of a choice for him," he said.

Derek pshawed. "He should never have put himself into a position where he had to make such a choice."

"Of course he shouldn't!" Keatings admitted. "And I shouldn't have poured glue into my tutor's keyhole at Univ.; and Joyce shouldn't—shouldn't spend hours titivating her face in front of the glass, and you shouldn't be the pompous prig you are! We all do what we shouldn't sometimes—even you. After all, Father's rather a fine old bull, with life pretty active in him, and . . . well, Mum must have been pretty dull for him sometimes. It was fairly obvious they didn't get on, and I expect it's pretty difficult for a strong, healthy man——"

"I should stop there," interrupted Derek, with a laugh. "You're getting too realistic. There are sisters in the room."

"All right. You needn't go on," said Joyce, lifting her wet and beautiful eyes. "I understand what you're trying to say."

"Yes, Father's a fine strong creature in his way," continued Keatings. "I used to notice it and feel rather glad that I was his son. I—I don't think I feel any the less glad now."

It was at this moment that Peggy dropped on to a chair, laid her arm along its back and, burying her face in the crook of her elbow, cried, "Daddy. Oh, poor Daddy. . . ." Responsive tears leapt to Keatings's eyes, and Tony struggled with the lump in his throat.

"It's going to be damned awkward for his son in the future," Derek persisted, but more gently. "I should think we'll all have to change our name."

"My name's good enough for me," said Keatings, hardly mastering a sob.

"After the divorce there'll be a case in the Church courts, and he'll certainly be inhibited if not unfrocked. Then I suppose they'll proceed against him in the civil courts."

"Don't be more of an idiot than you can help," Keatings scoffed, who seemed to get relief by directing his conflicting emotions into a common effort against his brother. "A Church court'll find him guilty, certainly, and the Bishop'll deprive and inhibit him, but what the devil have the civil courts got to do with it? Don't you realize that it's only because Father's a parson, and because parsons set themselves a higher standard than laymen, that he's done anything technically wrong at all."

"Wife-desertion's an offence, isn't it?"

"Certainly not. They can compel you to provide for your wife, and Father's done that. He had about six hundred a year of his own, and he's promised that Mum shall have half of it. He says he'd have give it all to her, only he had nothing else, and there was this kid, and it'll be difficult enough for him to find work."

"What a mess! What a mess!" sighed Derek.

Joyce spoke in an even voice. "So three hundred a year is all that we've got between us and penury?"

"That, and our brains," agreed Keatings.

"He shouldn't have run," said Derek abruptly. "He should have stood his ground."

"Oh, my God, what a fool you are!" sighed Keatings, "Talk about fine words and phrases! You're a slave to them, What could he do but run? Could he stand up and face the congregation to-morrow? Could he walk about the——"

"Of course not," Tony burst in. "Derek's got about as much imagination as a horse."

"Could he walk about the streets, knowing that everyone who passed him would turn round, and that people would rush to their windows to see him pass? Could he face the servants? Could he face *us*?"

"Oh, don't . . . !" pleaded Joyce. "It's all so terrible."

And Peggy, tearless now, pressed her sister's hand.

"Where's Mother?" asked Tony.

"Upstairs in her room," Derek answered.

And a silence fell: none of them seemed to know what to do about their mother.

The three boys began to talk plans for the future. Joyce took no part, gazing in front of her. And Peggy, who had been restless since the mention of her mother, got up and went quietly out of the room. For a few minutes she stood in the empty hall, undecided. None of these children found it easy to be endearing or intimate with their mother, and Peggy, longing to go to her with comfort, hesitated. There was a real heart-bursting sympathy in her to-night, and not a little of her habitual self-dramatization, too. She was hurt and ashamed to think that, in such an hour as this, she should have been filled with a most pleasing picture of herself entering like a messenger of solace into her mother's room, and should have rushed from the others so as to win the credit of being first at her mother's side. But when someone moved in the breakfast-room, perhaps to come out and anticipate her in this kindly work, she hesitated no longer; the impetus sent her hurrying up the stairs. At her mother's door, she knocked, and, feeling a kiss of love and pity mounting to her lips, she turned the handle and entered.

It was Tony who had moved in the breakfast-room. Let Keatings and Derek continue their planning, in which manifestly they were not unhappy. He himself was feeling that stiffness in his limbs and a new tiredness in his eyes. The bruise on his thigh, the cut on his knee, and the faint sprain in his wrist were no longer centres aching with well-being. Rather did some of the lassitude and sickness of the world seem to have

found an expression there. The thirst had left this throat, and he had little desire for tea. He rose, left the breakfast-room, picked up his kit-bag of football-togs and carried them up to his room, where, loving a dramatic action, he tossed them into a corner like superannuated things. Then he rested his weary body on the bed and tried to think out the future. But his thoughts, too tired to cut into new country, roamed languidly about the past.

"Could he face the congregation to-morrow? Could he face the servants . . . and us?" He was thinking of a far-off day when as a small boy he had decided that he could not face the street or the congregation or the servants and had walked away from his home, in a dull pain. And this same father had found him and brought him back, with an arm round his shoulder. And now this father himself was suffering all that fear of being seen, that sick decision that he must wander off. "O God, help him." Tony, who had long ago abandoned prayers, except in sudden emergencies, found himself muttering this, as his imagination hurt him with vivid and vivid pictures of his father's suffering. Sharp, for his own relief, came the petitions, "O God, help him. . . . O God . . . help him."

It was soon seen that when Canon O'Grogan evacuated a position impossible to hold, he had acted wisely. By resigning his benefice he saved himself and his family from the disgrace of deprivation; by his retirement to a cheap resort in Belgium and an undertaking that he would not, at least while living with Mrs. Blayre, come seeking a priestly cure in England, he enabled the Bishop to hold his hand from disciplinary action. Canon O'Grogan just disappeared from St. Austin's, Kensington, and a Canon Eadie administered the parish till the benefice should be filled. The curates remained; and Mr. Flote the verger still superintended the cleaning of the church, and kept its registers, and saw that the flowers were on the altar, and guarded the vestments for whosoever should be called to wear them.

The O'Grogan family, for so long the noisy centre of parochial life, disappeared quickly too. Archdeacon Gabriel bore down upon them like a successful dreadnought steaming to the boats of a foundered liner, and took them into his own house, till such time as they found a home for themselves. And

St. Austin's Vicarage, with its furniture gathering dust in the untenanted rooms, stared blind and silent at the long road. Keatings accepted the Archdeacon's salving operations with a good grace and a quiet courtesy, explaining to his brothers and sisters, "He means well. He can't help his manner or his face. Of course he's enjoying his benevolence, but it's a good job someone's happy."

"I think he's bossy and bumptious!" Derek pronounced. "It's humiliating to have to accept their benevolence."

"Certainly, certainly," agreed Keatings. "But we've managed to get into a position where humiliations abound. Can't be helped. Did I tell you, by the bye, that I was engaged on my autobiography which is to be entitled 'Disgrace Abounding'?"

"But I always hoped," Peggy bewailed, "to come to *his* assistance when he should be in disgrace."

"Well, there's still hope," said Keatings.

They were obliged to find a home for their furniture quickly. The new Incumbent, the Rev. John Cambridge, and his wife, had already entered upon their duties, dangling their diplomacy wherever they went, and being no more than discreetly (if ubiquitously) vocal about "their difficult position." These good people were waiting to fill the Vicarage with righteousness again. So Mrs. O'Grogan, on the Archdeacon's advice, rented a small, forty-pound-a-year house in Cullingham Avenue, Chiswick, where the speculative builders had lately been cutting up the old gardens of the Royal Horticultural Society into streets of red-brick villas. The family moved into No. 17 Cullingham Avenue on a day before the Christmas of 1905.

There had been debate among them as to who should go back to the Vicarage and see the furniture into the vans.

"It's going to be pretty awful, standing on the steps with every eye in the road peeping round the curtains," said Tony.

"Yes," Peggy agreed most cheerfully. "And the postman'll probably explain to the removal men what it's all about."

"Bless him!" said Joyce. "Let him be happy."

"Mother mustn't go," said Derek, always ready for the grand manner. "One of us must take it all off her shoulders."

"Well, I don't know what you people are quarrelling about," Keatings languidly commented. "*I'm* going. Derek'll look after the old lady and take her to Chatsworth Towers—" this was his sub-humorous name for the little jerry-built affair at Chiswick—"and see the first van-load home, while

Peggy makes her a cup of tea. And I'll cycle to the Vicarage and watch that everything goes aboard, and then go the rounds and see that nothing's been left behind—not even a—” he mentioned a humble fixture on a privy wall—“and then I'll come out and lock the door quietly behind me, and all will be over.”

“And I'm going with Keatings,” declared Joyce. “And what's more I'm not going to hide in shame behind the hall door. I shall dance up and down the steps and ripple with laughter every now and then, and let everyone see that I'm enjoying the fun immensely.”

“Certainly, certainly,” Keatings endorsed.

“Besides,” added Joyce, “I like removal men. They're always the sweetest souls.”

So Keatings and Joyce arrived and opened the deserted Vicarage about half an hour before the two pantehnicons backed against the pavement. Keatings, pipe in mouth, strolled back and forth from the house to the tail-boards of the vans ; gave a helping hand with the piano ; instructed the men which articles of furniture they might smash so that he could have the insurance money ; and chaffed the errand boys who stood about, baskets on shoulders, picking their teeth with the straw that dropped from the crates. Joyce, if an acquaintance passed, smiled merrily ; she fondled the four great horses whose lips were busy in their nose-bags while their eyes were busy with her ; she made tea in the kitchen for the last time, and sent it out to the men ; and she demanded of Keatings if they weren't too perfectly adorable when they sat down on the tail-boards of their vans and drank it, and cut up their bread and cheese with their jack-knives.

By three o'clock the last article was shipped and the van doors closed. Keatings and Joyce pulled down the blinds of the Vicarage, beginning at the upper room which had been their nursery. They took a farewell look at the empty breakfast-room and hall, and came out and locked the door, and carried the keys to Mr. Flote, in his office in the church. The little old man pressed their hands significantly as they said good-bye, but, with his natural tact, he offered no word of compassion.

Then Joyce walked along the pavement to take a Chiswick bus in the Kensington Road. Ahead of her, down the long vista of the street, whose tall uniform houses and intermittent

lamp-posts seemed the very framework of her childhood, ambled the second pantechicon, with its crew lolling on the tail-board. It was the only vehicle in the street, and she doubted not that people were half rising from their chairs by front windows to watch the retreat of the O'Grogans. If they watched her they should see only a brisk and happy girl. Before she reached the Kensington Road, Keatings, pursuing the pantechicon, passed her on his bicycle and waved. "See you at Chatsworth Towers," he called; and she laughed and waved back.

PART III

CHAPTER I

THE PART OF MR. PEIDESTROS

THE O'Grogan Family, quickly recovering from its stroke, sat up to enjoy its convalescence. As with other convalescents, its members were soon asserting their strong appetite for life, and examining the larder.

Keatings decided with some satisfaction that he was now the Regent and declared that he must live at home so that he could "look after the old lady." Through the Archdeacon's influence he obtained employment in a Clerical Assurance Society, and disliked his work richly; but it enabled him to return each night to the little villa in Cullingham Avenue, where, when the sixteen-year-old maid was having her "evening out," he would help his mother lay the supper against the arrival of his sisters, and help them all to clear it away afterwards, and take his turn at "wiping up," only allowing himself the murmured protest, "I'll do it; I'll do it, mind you; but I'd have you know it's Woman's Work."

Joyce, after a term in a Chiswick High School as a junior mistress, which she pronounced "a perfectly poisonous occupation," found something much more to her fancy when she commercialized her good looks and her social gifts by becoming a Society Reporter for the *Chiswick and Gunnersbury Times*. "It's lovely," she said, on returning from a wedding or a ball or a political tea-party. "They all see that I've a note-book in my hand, and they seek me out. They dance in front of me that I may see their frocks. They leave themselves about, in my immediate vicinity, hoping for the favour of my eye; and I always make them happy by writing down something, whether I publish it or not. Besides, it sells the paper. Yes, children: I am one of the most sought-after persons at every assembly."

Derek, with St. Paul's and Oxford behind him, had no difficulty in earning his "sixty pounds a year resident" at an Eastbourne preparatory school. And Peggy: she became a Lady Almoner for a Benevolent Society, and went to see if the applicants for aid were scamps or not. She much enjoyed this "going about doing good" at other people's expense, but she was probably the worst servant the Society ever employed, for she could not bear that the enormous, fat, slatternly women whom she visited and questioned should do anything, next time she called on them, but rise up and call her blessed, so she sent in enthusiastic reports about them all. Her dislike of being disliked must have cost the Society immense sums; and her conscience did not fail to submit to her, twice or three times a day, that it was wrong, very wrong, thus to buy a wide popularity with public funds.

The Archdeacon had been emphatic that Tony should continue his promising career at St. Paul's, at least till the end of the next summer term. That would bring him to the threshold of his eighteenth birthday, and if he could attain, as seemed likely, to one of the Eighth forms, his chance of getting a junior mastership would be handsomely increased. Keatings, the self-appointed guardian of his youngest brother, agreed; but when the Archdeacon offered to pay Tony's fees, he declined with grave thanks, assuring his uncle that he could find the money himself. And he did so; and Tony and his schoolbooks took a District Railway train daily to Hammer-smith throughout the spring and summer terms of 1906. He did well in those terms, less from conscientious effort, than because he could not help it, and he took the Halley Prize in the Apposition which crowned his school life.

"Pity he couldn't go on with it," said Keatings to his sisters. "A damned shame. He'd have got a better scholarship to Oxford than either of the Gabriels, and a fellowship before he'd done; and that would have deflated the Archdeacon properly. I was counting on him more than any of us to do the trick. Now he'll only be a wretched usher at a preparatory school, while John and Warner Gabriel are throwing their weight about Oxford."

"There's plenty of time," said Joyce. "I've a sort of feeling that I'm going to do something rather bright. And there's Derek, too. He's got bounce and push enough for anything."

"Oh, he's a fool," said Keatings.

There were in those days three outstanding firms of scholastic agents in London: Landseer, Thyme and Co., Leman and Finchley, Ltd., and Mr. Peidestros. The first two stood out as the agents with the best schools on their lists; and Mr. Peidestros stood out as the man to come to if your qualifications were dubious. The first two, as their names suggested, were business-like firms; Mr. Peidestros was less a firm than a person. Landseer, Thyme and Co., and Leman and Finchley, Ltd., had good premises with several neat rooms; Mr. Peidestros had what Tony called "a room and a bit," and both untidy. He was a tall, clean-shaven old man with huge features and a mop of waving blue-grey hair. To echo and emphasize this striking embellishment of hair he always wore a grey morning coat, and grey trousers, and a grey stock round his high collar, and a single dark pearl in its centre. The grey morning coat was always buttoned at the waist, so that its lapels bulged out above and gave his figure the appearance of possessing, not a chest, but a breast. When he stepped out from his offices into the winter air, he wore grey spats and a grey sombrero hat; and when into the summer sun, white spats, a white panama with a brim like an awning caught in the wind. And yet he was hardly a dandy, for the whole grey symphony was a little disordered; and incisive eyes could detect behind the pearl pin and the grey stock a very cheap flannel shirt.

His skin had an olive tint that set his clients guessing at his nationality. Some thought him Spanish; some, influenced by his name, averred that he must be Greek; Derek, who had met him before securing the Eastbourne post, voted him Sicilian; and Tony suspected that he was a Turk. But all his clients were sure that he was a Dago; and this not bitterly, except when his promises had failed to materialize. His office was a long, rectangular room, the first-floor-front of a Wimbury Street house; and it held his desk at the end near the door, and on the rest of its floor the littered tables of three girl-typists—"his daughters" as Mr. Peidestros smilingly called them. At the far end a door led to a second room which was little more than a converted cupboard, and this was the place of interviews between headmasters and their prospective assistants. So it was that Tony defined his premises as "a room and a bit."

Landseer, Thyme and Co., and Leman and Finchley, Ltd., shook doubtful heads over Tony, and explained that as a rule they dealt only with graduates, and preferably with Oxford and Cambridge men, but they would certainly inform him if they heard of any likely situation; Mr. Peidestros met him, literally, with open arms; that is to say, he rose from his desk and extended at the level of his breast two fin-like hands, palms upward, as if he were Sir Henry Irving welcoming before an audience a son long lost; then swung the hands, without bringing them into contact with his visitor towards a vacant chair in front of his desk, while he said in even tones, "Come in, sir; come in, come in. Be seated." Still with the grace of an actor, he dipped one of the fin-like hands into a drawer and took out a box of Russian cigarettes in coffee-brown paper and offered one to his new juvenile lead; he struck a match and held it to Tony's cigarette, as if this were a sacramental ceremony before business could be inaugurated; then pulled up the knees of his trousers and sat down in his arm-chair and leaned back to survey his guest.

He opened a cross-examination; and his gay and noisy questions to Tony about his past life and his future hopes much embarrassed the youth, in the presence of the girl typists; who, however, were marvellously indifferent and clicked away at their instruments as if unconscious of their principal's hearty laughter and ingratiating cross-examination. It was the tender, encouraging, put-you-at-your-ease cross-examination that a counsel reserves for his own witnesses.

"Yurse—yes, yes." Mr. Peidestros breathed encouragement and confidence in a manner half a clergyman's and half a doctor's. "Yurse; we'll get something for you—certainly. You'll do all right. We want your sort. But you're young, you know. You look very young. I can't promise you a good stipend. Get you plenty of jobs 'on mutual terms,' but you can't do with that, can you?"

Tony inquired what "on mutual terms" might mean.

"Hospitality in exchange for services rendered, but no salary," explained Mr. Peidestros.

Tony shook his head, saying he couldn't do with that; and Mr. Peidestros nodded his, saying, "No, no; no, no, of course not. Must have pocket money, I suppose?"

Tony said that he didn't see how he could do with less than about fifty pounds a year.

"*Wurl*—well, well," considered Mr. Peidestros. "Yes, we ought to be able to get you something like that. Let's see what subjects we can put you down for." He took a sheet of foolscap and, plunging a long hand into the cavity behind his bulging lapels, drew a gold pencil from somewhere. This he laid down on the paper, that he might rub his hands and wrists together before writing, which he did for a long time, and slowly, like a fly rubbing his forelegs on the side of a plate. "Well. You can teach Classics, can't you?"

"I think so," answered Tony, diffidently. "I've done nothing else at St. Paul's for the last three years."

"Quite so, quite so," encouraged Mr. Peidestros. "I'll put you down as Classics. Were you really high in the school? . . . Probably pretty high," he quickly suggested, before Tony could reply.

"I was in the Middle Eighth."

"That's not the top form, is it?"

"No. Just below it. The Upper Eighth is the top form."

"Well, we'll say you were in the Eighth at St. Paul's. If you were as high as that, you ought to be able to teach Classics to Scholarship standard."

"Oh, I don't know. . . ."

"Well, we'll put you down 'Scholarship Standard.' They may not ask you to do it. Almost sure not to, with a junior master. Can you teach French?"

"No. I've forgotten all my French."

"Oh, but didn't you do French at St. Paul's?"

"A little."

"Well, we'll put you down for French. They don't want much at preparatory schools." He wrote it in a large hand, very free with the paper-space and magnificently independent of the ruled lines. "And Mathematics? What about Mathematics?"

"No, I shouldn't like to teach Maths."

"But you must have done your Euclid and Algebra once?"

"Yes, but——"

"We'll put you down Elementary Mathematics. Now about English."

"I ought to be all right with Literature, I think."

"Good. Fond of Literature, are you? Good. Well, the other English subjects are simple enough. We'll put you down All English Subjects. Divinity, now? You ought to be rather special with Divinity."

"Why?" Tony laughed.

Mr. Peidestros spread a palm towards the ceiling. "Are you not a parson's son?"

"I suppose I could teach Scripture," admitted Tony.

And Mr. Peidestros nodded most encouragingly and breathed, "Yurse—yes, yes. We'll put you down Divinity. Don't know any Book-keeping or Shorthand, do you?"

"Good Lord, no!"

"Oh, well. They're not much in your line. But sometimes we get a school that makes a feature of a commercial education. But they're not your sort of schools. Not the best sort. No, you want something of a better class than that. Now there's Games. How are you off for Games? You look as though you could play most Games. Get yer colours or anything at St. Paul's?"

"I was not bad at Rugger. I was tried for the Second XV."

"That's good enough. 'All Games.'"

He picked up the list of attainments and scanned it contemplatively. Now Mr. Peidestros differed from other men in contemplation, who often pull their chins, in that he would finger his fine nose long and strokingly, as if pleased to be reminded of its line and mass; and would take his cigarette from his lips and wave its scented smoke under that nose, as if offering a tribute of incense to a magnificent organ. It was an action more suited to a cigar than a cigarette, even as his high manners and his dignified morning coat were suited to something better than a soiled flannel shirt. "*Wurl*," he said, having performed these ceremonies, "your subjects look promising enough. Classics to Scholarship Standard, French, All English Subjects, Divinity, Elementary Mathematics, All Games. Now—wait a minute—we've got to get certain details about yourself. What's your height?"

"I'm five foot eleven in my boots."

"Say 'Six foot in your socks'—you haven't stopped growing yet. When an applicant is as young as you are, its best to compensate for it in height. Your age is what?"

"I shall be eighteen in September."

Mr. Peidestros shook his head.

"Is that all?" He blew some smoke through his lips. "Better say nineteen." And after surveying Tony for a second or two, he showed, by a nodding of his head, that he was satisfied

with the wisdom of his decision. "Yes; you can carry off nineteen all right; and you'll be it soon enough. What's your religion?"

"Oh, Church of England."

"Good. That's good. You're not High or Low, or anything like that, are you? It's just as well not to be. Or, at any rate, don't make a noise about it, if you are."

"No. I think I'm just plain Church of England."

Mr. Peidestros was more than ever satisfied and encouraging. "*Yurse*—yes, yes. It's best. It's best in the long run. Then you can accommodate yourself to whatever turns up."

"Of course I don't think I'm anything, *really*," Tony explained.

"Oh, nonsense, nonsense. You must have some religion. We can't get you any posts without religion. Naturally not." Mr. Peidestros left that point as too obvious for discussion. "Now about your references. There's your Headmaster at St. Paul's——"

"The *Highb* master," Tony corrected. "Mr. Walker was High master all my time, but he'd certainly be rude to anyone that wrote to him. He's rather given that way."

"*Yurse*; some people are like that. It's a pity, I always think. It's so easy to be pleasant. . . . Pity we can't use him—a great pity . . . !"

"There was another master who would speak rather well for me, I think; a Mr. Jamieson."

"H'm." Mr. Peidestros was doubtful, and stroked his nose three or four times. "Better someone high-sounding, you know."

"There's my uncle, Archdeacon Gabriel——"

"Of course! Of course. We'll put him first. Clergymen always go down—especially the—er—the higher ranks. Any army men?"

"My mother's uncle's a big pot at the War Office—General Warham."

"Is he? Is he, now? Why, excellent, excellent! Nothing better. General Warren, is he? Fancy that! *Warham*—yes, I meant Warham. I shall certainly put him down, and I think we might safely put his address as the War Office, London——"

"But I don't at all know that he'll consent to——"

"Oh, yes, he will, my boy. He won't let you down. Besides, very likely they won't write to him at all. Oh, yes, I've

not the least doubt I shall be able to find you something. You should score well in an interview, you know; you've a good presence—quite a good presence. Well, I'll let you know as things turn up." They had now risen and were approaching the door. "And there's a little registration fee we charge—to cover postage and so on——" Mr. Peidestros waved such a prosaic subject away with his palm, to somewhere beyond his left shoulder. "Yurse. Just a half-crown. But send it along any time, my boy. Don't exercise yourself about it. Send it any time." It was the tone of a large creditor doing the big and generous thing by his debtor; and on this happy arrangement they parted. "*Good-bye; good-bye,*" said Mr. Peidestros, in a smiling benediction, and closed the door, still nodding automatically.

And certainly for every typed sheet that Landseer, Thyme and Co. or Leman and Finchley, Ltd., sent to Tony, Mr. Peidestros sent seven. Each sheet contained details of a vacancy in what Mr. Peidestros called "a good class preparatory school for gentlemen's sons," or "a well established school for the sons of business and professional men;" and after the details came the words, "Write promptly but carefully to Mr. ——," or perhaps, "Write promptly and carefully to Miss ——," for not a few of Mr. Peidestros's schools seemed to be conducted by women. Often, at the bottom, there was a piece of advice pencilled in the agent's large and generous hand.

Tony, however, was not served ill by Mr. Peidestros. There were one or two of the better headmasters who realized that you could often draw a promising fish out of the Peidestros backwater, and accordingly left a tentative line there, as well as in the main stream of Landseer, Thyme and Co., and Leman and Finchley, Ltd. Such a one was Mr. Sugden, of Stratton Lye, Hurst, Sussex, and he had the additional wisdom to perceive that you got a man cheaper from Mr. Peidestros. A correspondence, passing between Tony and Mr. Sugden, increased in interest and good will, till at length an interview in Mr. Peidestros's little cell crowned it with the offer of a junior mastership, and its acceptance.

Mr. Sugden was a huge pylon of a man, widening downward from his small head and his narrow sloping shoulders to his big chest and bigger loins. On the same plan his hands and wrists seemed too large for the narrower upper arm. But the voice that came from the top of this pylon was loud and friendly,

and the eyes could twinkle up there, like the light on the Tower of Pharos ; and if he bragged somewhat about his school, well, that was an amiable fault. "I think you'll be happy in your work," he kept repeating. "They're delightful boys, delightful ;" and when he and his new master emerged from the cell, he called over the heads of the girl typists to Mr. Peidestros : "The trick is done, Peidestros. O'Grogan is coming to us. I think he'll be very happy in the work ; it's a delightful lot of boys we've got just now, truly delightful." And Mr. Peidestros rose and extended both his hands towards Tony with a gesture that might have been borrowed from an Egyptian wall-painting, and said : "Well, well, well. Didn't I say so ? Yes, I think I found the right man for you. . . . Now isn't that excellent ?" and then he placed a paternal hand on Tony's shoulder and shepherded them both to the door, as a kindly and talkative registrar might shepherd a newly-married couple into their future happiness.

CHAPTER II

THE SECRET CORRIDOR AGAIN

IN the train on that Tuesday afternoon, when he was journeying to Hassocks Station to take up his work at Stratton Lye, Tony was apprehensive and restless; his body and breathing were troubled by a conflict between his nervousness of what he was going to and his impatience with the train for its halting approach. But he had no notion that in days to come he would look back upon this journey, as do all men upon one or two journeys in their lives, and think: "Strange that I never knew when I stepped into the train or gazed out at the passing landscape that I was travelling to *that*!" And yet he was fast moving into a stretch of the old, unquiet brilliance, so desired.

The train slowed into a station, and his breathing went to pieces: it was Hassocks. The train stopped, but not this panicky fluttering of his heart. The fussiness on the platform and a blend of voices disarrayed his thinking, and he hardly knew what he did, as he bundled out with his gladstone bag. There were quick high voices belonging to young boys who were probably his future pupils, and the steadier but very disturbing voices of their parents. There were isolated men and women waiting on the platform, or walking with a smile to a marooned passenger; and any one of them might be a colleague of his, or any of the ladies might be Mrs. Sugden herself. That hard-bitten old coachman; perhaps he was a retainer of Stratton Lye.

There were at least six little groups of boys and elders, and he wondered whether carriages had been provided for them in the station yard. Would he be able to elude them all and drive up to the school alone? But even as he resolved to conquer for himself this last lane of privacy, a powerful hand gripped his shoulder. It was Mr. Sugden hurrying by.

"Hallo, O'Grogan. Good! I'll be back to you in a minute. You can come up in my fly."

"Oh, thanks," murmured Tony, but Mr. Sugden was some distance away, a high black lighthouse, surged about by a sea of boys in red and yellow caps.

To go up in Mr. Sugden's fly, with, perhaps, a strange parent and a brace of strange boys, was the last thing he had wanted to do. The bright and intelligent remarks he had prepared for his first meeting with his principal or his pupils were quite unsuited to their juxtaposition together, within the embrace of a station fly; those adapted to Mr. Sugden had been for his ear alone, and the jests composed for the boys might even displease their headmaster; and his intellect felt too battered now for the invention of more appropriate felicities. Instead of appearing impressive and vigorous—a positive character, as he had rehearsed—he would appear dull and negative.

But Mr. Sugden gave him little time to worry. Possessing a hustle that one could scarcely have foreseen in a human column so massive and tapering, he was far more engaged in appearing hearty and effective before the parents than in observing whether his new master was positive or negative. "Come along, O'Grogan. Come and see how you like us. We'll take Mrs. Galloway and young John up with us. Young John's a new boy. Mrs. Galloway, this is Mr. O'Grogan, my latest addition to the staff. A brilliant youngster who's going to do great things for the boys, yours included. Come along, all."

The dusty fly, with its ambling irregular horse, rolled out of the station yard, jolting up and down on its springs and dandling Mr. Sugden into a few minutes' silence, as a cradle might. He and Mrs. Galloway vibrated quietly in the back seat, and Tony and the new boy in the seat facing them. Their road took them over a crossways and along a ridge of high ground, from whose height the whole of North Sussex fell away. On their left was a narrow stretch of weald, and then the long swell of the South Downs, lifting and falling like a high sea till, with the rearing of a tidal wave, it struck the earth in the great curve of Wolstonbury. Wolstonbury Hill, round as the top of a world, dominating the more volatile hills by the splendour of its individuality, reigning over all the country at its base by the simple right of its own lofty, serene, self-sufficient integrity—Wolstonbury, at this first presentation of itself, imposed upon Tony a fealty

that he never forswore. He loved Wolstonbury in that hour, and loved it all his days.

"Yes, that's Wolstonbury," said Mr. Sugden. "Not the highest of the Downs, but the grandest to my thinking. There are plenty higher but they haven't the majestic isolation or the perfect roundness of Wolstonbury. All the South Downs are noblemen, I always tell the boys, but Wolstonbury's the one perfect gentleman of the lot. I like to think that Stratton Lye is at its foot."

Mr. Sugden, Tony had observed, had a habit of turning every thing in the world, from a mountain to a measles epidemic, into credit for his school, and he seemed now, in the presence of the parent, to be cashing Wolstonbury into the same good money.

They were passing some modern red-brick houses, dotted at intervals along the road, and Mr. Sugden deplored them. "Dreadful! Dreadful! No style. No taste. It's just because there's a railway station at Hassocks. . . . But it's healthy," he added, remembering the parent at his side. "Everybody says it's one of the healthiest spots in Sussex. All this rapid growth is a tribute to its healthiness. And it gets better as we get out of it. You'll think the neighbourhood round Stratton Lye very picturesque, I think."

"The air seems good," Tony obliged, most anxious to say something. "Wonderfully fresh after London."

"Yes, everyone notices that," agreed Mr. Sugden, hastily cashing the winds. "We're quite high here: a hundred and fifty feet above sea-level. And, whenever possible, we get the boys on to the top of Wolstonbury."

Seemingly he was impressed by Tony's obliging remark; and, rather than waste time while he had a parent in the carriage, he proceeded to cash Tony himself; he alluded to his junior and senior scholarships at St. Paul's, and to his supposed prowess in cricket and football; and, bethinking himself of St. Paul's and its great and terrible High Master, Mr. Walker, he promptly cashed that gentleman, explaining to Mrs. Galloway that "Walker had turned out more classical scholars than any man of his time;" and, determining like a good business-man that before he had finished with Tony he must have exhausted the last halfpenny of his value, he gave a little time to thought, after which he remembered Archdeacon Gabriel, and cashed him.

The road, widening through the village of Hurst had left the ugly and recent villas, and was narrowing into quaintness, if not into beauty. A few large houses stood behind their stone or brick walls; a few shops of irregular pattern fronted the pavement, and a church with a tall steeple loomed ahead. Tony stared at the shops and the houses and the church; and, often, in after months, when it became his habit to take an evening walk from Stratton Lye into Hurst, he would wonder that the pavements and garden-walls and shop-faces could be so different from the strange, agitating pictures of his first evening. The leisurely horse bobbed on and on, beyond the pavements into the country, till, about three-quarters of a mile from the village, it turned through an iron gate. Tony had just time, before they went into a darkness beneath large untidy yews and blown Scotch firs, to notice that the garden of Stratton Lye was bounded along the road by a wall of stone and flint, behind which rose a lofty screen of trees. Nothing of the house could be seen from the road, and, truly, the garden's grey wall and the gloomy rampart of trees promised little but some dark old mausoleum. The carriage drive, dark beneath the yews and firs, was rough and stony, and its borders were widths of sparse grass carpeted with ivy.

But, suddenly, as the drive bent, the house and its lawns broke upon the view; and both were beautiful. The lawns were trimmed and sun-shot, with clumps of rhododendron and two magnificent clipped yews that might have been lifted from the picture of some marbled pool in Greece; and the house dreamed above its garden, a rambling place of deep red brick, with windows of brown wood, and roof of Horsham stone, and irregular chimney stacks, now noosed in the sun's long rays.

"A goodly sight, isn't it?" Mr. Sugden inquired of Tony. "I always think it's so desirable that young boys should be brought up in beautiful surroundings, instead of in your banal modern residences, as they do in the Eastbourne preparatory schools." He had commercialized its loveliness straightaway.

Next minute Tony had lost Mr. Sugden and was being led by a butler towards the Common Room.

He entered a large, oblong room, with a big table in its centre and some torn leather chairs round the fireplace. A large engraving of the Coronation of King Edward VII. hanging over the marble mantelpiece, was the only picture in the room. A baize notice-board, a tall, half-empty bookshelf,

and the Parish Almanack broke the bareness of the distempered walls. Three lofty windows, cheaply curtained, looked out upon the kitchen gardens. Two men sat in the fireside chairs, and one lounged on the support of fender and mantelpiece. Those in the chairs were alarming to Tony, for one had a moustache and the other a grey beard. But the one on the fender was comforting; he was clean-cheeked, clear-eyed, and certainly no more than two years older than Tony.

"Oh, are you O'Grogan?" asked the moustached man.

"Yes, I believe so," answered Tony, in a terrible effort at humour, which made him blush.

They forgave him this, and introduced themselves: the moustached man as Browning, the grey-haired man as La Motte, and the tall, merry-faced youngster as Winter.

"Though we generally call him Cyril," added Browning, "because he's a child."

"Well, I'm no longer the Baby of the Staff—now," laughed Winter.

Tony covered his misliking of the jest with a merry:

"Why, how old are you?"

"Twenty. And don't say you're twenty-one, because any body can see you're not more than eighteen."

"I'm nearly twenty," Tony assured them.

A gong sounded in the entrance hall, its reverberations diminishing beneath the crescendo of young voices and hurrying feet.

"The feet of the sweet things who'll devastate the next few months of your life," sighed Browning. "It's Tea."

That first tea was a confused memory to the new master; he carried away from it to his little bed-chamber in the roof an impression of a large hall, with long trestle tables feeding sixty talkative boys, none of whom individualized himself. The masters sat at the heads or feet of the tables, and one young governess presided over a table of very small boys. Maids bustled about, and a sailing, overdressed woman who was, it appeared, the Lady Matron, made a royal visitation of the tables and the kitchens. Up in his slope-roofed bedchamber Tony unpacked his trunk, moving shirts from trunk to drawer in that dull, automatic drift that signifies an acceptance of loneliness. He was surprised that a picture of Peggy which he placed at an angle on his dressing-table could raise such a melancholy.

Next came an interview with Mr. Sugden, in which his duties were explained. And when it was over he felt tired with his long-sustained effort to be impressive. "Why can't one be natural?" he thought, and wandered back to the Common Room.

In the Common Room he gravitated naturally to the master of his own age, finding him the one solid piece of comfort in Stratton Lye. They filled the evening with talk. The talk pricked Tony with alarm at first when the duties of the masters were mentioned, but presently it changed its character and became very pleasing, very engrossing—a series of confidences surprising for a first night, but rich with the promise of sympathy and kinship. It was just before supper. Browning was on duty in a class-room; La Motte had taken a stick and gone for a walk; and Winter, left in the armchair with Tony opposite him, had begun, most plainly, to turn his thoughts from the subject in hand to the closed door of the room and the sounds outside. He seemed to be anxiously looking for somebody, and at the same time to be anxious to hide his anxiety. And Tony, for a moment, grew uncomfortable again, wondering if he were in the way.

"Are you expecting somebody?" he asked, feigning a laugh.

"Oh no . . . no," answered Winter, hurriedly. "Some of the boys come in to say good night sometimes. They're decent kids, you know. Really affectionate."

"I suppose so," said Tony, dutifully.

"Yes. . . ." Winter hesitated, opened his lips to speak again, but abandoned the words. He filled a pipe instead. But it was clear that his thoughts were playing around the truncated end of the conversation, and after a silence he stuttered to give them shape.

"Yes. We've extraordinarily wrong ideas about boys—about some of them, at any rate—especially when they're about twelve or thirteen, haven't we?"

"Wrong? How do you mean?"

"Well, even the brightest and cheekiest have a rather feminine quality—some of them. But we don't like to allow it."

"Feminine?"

"Yes. . . ." Winter's clear and open face reddened, but his eyes looked directly into his new friend's, as if defying him to think him other than the straightest, sanest and least sentimental of masters. "For instance, there's a boy here—he's

—he's extraordinary! He's quite a useful athlete, he's probably the most impudent boy in the school, and he's reasonably good at his work. Not a scholarship case, but you've only got to hear him talk and—"

Winter paused, but Tony made no comment. Watching and listening, he had guessed from memories of his own that Winter was dilating on a person he loved to speak about.

"He's the last kid you'd call 'soft' or 'soppy,' O'Grogan. You'd be much more likely to call him 'forceful.' And yet he's got an absolutely feminine power of devotion. Hangs about you, and all that."

"Hangs about whom?"

"Well. . . ." Again Winter reddened, and conscious of this betrayal in his cheeks, flung a merry laugh in front of it. "About *me*. Strange, isn't it? That's what I mean, O'Grogan."

"Do you like it?"

Winter knocked the top ashes out of his pipe.

"Yes. . . ." he said. "Why shouldn't I be frank about it? Yes. I don't think I've ever experienced anything I've liked better. . . . I don't see why one should be ashamed to confess that, do you?"

"No. . . ." supplied Tony.

"I mean—everything that I feel for young Frank is good. I feel I want to do everything I can to help him. I feel I'd sacrifice myself an awful lot if it would advance him in the least, and I'm jolly careful all the time that it doesn't degenerate into favouritism. . . ."

Tony mused. "I've often. . ." he began.

Observing his abrupt stop, Winter encouraged him.

"You've often what?"

"I've often felt an affection for somebody that seemed so stupid that I was ashamed to speak of it—and yet I didn't quite see why it should be stupid——"

"Exactly! Exactly!" interrupted Winter enthusiastically.

"—Except," continued Tony, "that it's generally been all on my side."

"It's certainly not all on my side with young Doyly," said Winter, not without triumph. "I bet you anything you like that he won't go to bed to-night without slipping away from the others and coming here to say good night to me. Well, that's rather pleasant, you must admit."

"I do, certainly," Tony smiled.

"You'll see! I'm expecting him any minute. The younger boys have gone to bed, but he's one of the elders—nearly thirteen and stays up longer. They'll be making a move for bed any moment now. Of course he may *not* come."

There being no possible reply to this, Tony attended to his pipe, whose control, since he had no previous familiarity with the instrument, was proving an art that needed about as much mental concentration as an infant gives to its first walk. With his right hand he held the bowl firmly, with his teeth he secured the mouthpiece, and with his lungs he drew and drew and drew, just holding his own against a powerful resistance in the pipe. There was very little smoke anywhere to wave a triumph over his efforts.

The door of a distant class-room opened; a noise of feet and voices was disgorged into the hall and distributed up the stairs and along the lobbies; the voice of Browning called to someone; Winter quickly turned his ear towards the sounds; and at the same time the resistance in Tony's pipe settled down to its victory.

One voice was louder than the others, as it approached the Common Room door; a merry voice: "Don't piffle more than you can help, old Protheroe. . . . Of course I know you were born mad, but that's no reason why you should be proud of it. . . . What? . . . Oh, *did* you. . . . Well, who cares? . . . No, I shan't be long. . . . Shan't tell you, so sucks! It's no business of yours. Good night. Sleep well."

The voice was now outside the door. The steps belonging to it paused and there came a hesitant knock.

"Come in," called Winter, in a tone deliberately commonplace. He was now leaning back in his armchair with a newspaper extended before him; and Tony suspected that he had quickly assumed this careless posture, to conceal from his visitor that he had expected his coming. Tony knew the grammar of these disguises; none better.

Winter did not turn his eyes from his paper as Frank Doyly entered, but sent them down a column of print: that was part of the stage business. Tony looked straight at the visitor. He saw a slim but well-shaped boy, whose hair would have been fair, had he not, after the fashion of dawning adolescence, pomaded it tight to the scalp. The cheeks were still smooth and clean as a child's; the nose firm and small; the eyes lit with anticipated impudence. It was such a face as would, at

any time, have stirred an unrest in Tony, and a faint pain ; and its power had been doubled now by the talk that had introduced it. A swell of good-will to the boy lifted in him.

Winter looked up from his paper.

"Hallo, Frank. Settling down, eh?"

"No, sir."

The boy was standing with his fingers linked behind his back, while he jerked up and down from his toes to his heels.

"What do you mean? Of course you are settling down! Here you are, delighted to be back in school, burning to get to work——"

"Not half!"

"What do you mean—'Not half!'? Don't bring your odious Cockney jargon here."

"I never get settled down from the hols. till about half-term, and then it's time to get unsettled with the next hols. So I never settle down at school at all—really."

"Can't have anything of that sort this term. Your Common Entrance Exam is less than a year off."

"Oh, a year's a long time."

"Not an hour too long for all that you've got to learn. Mr. La Motte says your Latin Prose is a disgrace to the school."

"Oh, but old La Motte—*Mr.* La Motte, I mean—says that of everybody. It's his idea of being funny."

"Have you met Mr. O'Grogan yet?"

Frank Doyly became suddenly shy.

"No, sir."

"Well, you'd better present yourself. This is Frank Doyly, O'Grogan—probably the laziest good-for-nothing in the school." (How quickly Tony sensed the affection in the abuse!)

The boy offered a hand; and Tony, hardly less shy, took it. He was uncomfortably abashed by the boy's gaze which, because of his very diffidence, looked nervously straight into his.

"I don't know exactly why Frank should be honouring us with a visit to-night," continued Winter facetiously.

"I've come to say good night. You know that perfectly well," explained Doyly, released again into impudence.

"We should probably have enjoyed a fair rest without your good wishes."

"Oh, dash! don't be too funny. It's no good trying to do that sort of thing unless you do it well."

"Confound the child!" cried Winter, and, throwing out a hand, seized him by the wrist. "We won't put up with that brand of sauce, will we, O'Grogan?"

"Let me go," laughed Doyly, struggling to free himself. "You asked for it."

Winter brought his other hand into play, and soon captured Doyly's other wrist. The boy pulled and pushed and twisted and even pretended to bite the imprisoning fingers, but at the end he was still in Winter's grip, breathless, and staring with defiant impotence at his master's grin. Tony, watching with a smile, could feel what affection was being conveyed to the boy by Winter's tight-holding hands.

"You're beginning the term very badly, Frank Doyly," warned Winter. "This is mutiny, you know."

"I don't care," assured the breathless boy.

"I think I shall report it to Mr. Sugden."

"And I think I shall report you for ill-treatment."

"Not ill-treatment, my boy. Legitimate discipline."

"Oh, *is* it?"

"Yes. I have a witness here. Mr. O'Grogan is a stern believer in discipline."

Immediately at this reference to the new master Doyly turned shy again. He had no answer. Then, in one of Winter's unguarded moments, he jerked himself free, and put both hands into safe custody behind his back. Winter stared him up and down, as if deploring every aspect of his appearance.

"You look as though you'd come to spend the evening."

"No, I haven't. I've something better to do."

"Well, nothing's detaining you. Good night, child."

"Child! *Child*! You're not so frightfully old yourself, sir."

Winter turned to Tony.

"What's to be done with him, O'Grogan?"

"You're only about twenty-one," continued Doyly, "if that. And if you're not as much as that, you're still an 'infant' in law, and not responsible for your actions."

"Doyly, go straight to bed."

"All right, sir. It's dull enough here."

But he still stood, with his hands behind his back, and rising up and down on his toes, and seeming in no hurry to go.

"Say good night to Mr. O'Grogan first."

in Doyly proffered his hand to the new master, saying

with perfect respect : " Good night, sir," and nervously sending his eyes into Tony's ; eyes at once shy and impudent, hesitant and advancing. There pricked at once in Tony the pang of a desire to possess for himself the hero-worship now given to Winter, and to meet it with one of those inward and hidden devotions, compact of doubts and hopes, glammers and jealousies. Life was not life till such an experience filled it ; it lay fallow and empty, waiting for the visitation. . . . But no, it would be a poor game, robbing Winter of an affection in which he delighted. Winter was a good, simple fellow, and his frank confidences had won a quick and keen liking from Tony. Tony dropped Doyly's hand, and dropped the picture with it.

Doyly turned from him to Winter.

" Well, good night, sir."

" Good night, Frank, old man."

There was such simple affection in Winter's tone as made Tony glad of his decision.

But a seed of thought, once sown, may germinate of itself, despite all efforts to cancel it ; and Tony was always powerless against this particular seed. Next morning, as he sat down at the foot of one of the long trestle tables for breakfast, he found himself looking around for the one figure in Stratton Lye which had attracted him. There was Frank Doyly, quarrelling with other boys for the privilege of eating his breakfast on the left hand of Winter. He easily won the coveted place, seated himself there triumphantly, and opened a happy and probably impudent conversation ; and Tony, to his surprise, heard himself thinking : " Not for long ! " just as if competition had begun between him and Winter. And the idea of the competition was wonderfully pleasing. It made him both ashamed and happy.

After breakfast, when the boys and masters went out for half an hour's play in the field, Doyly walked hanging on Winter's arm. And while the other boys played Touch or strolled about in couples with an arm on each other's shoulders, Doyly kept his favoured place by his master's side. A bell rang high up on the bricks of the back wall, and all flowed into the class-rooms. Tony spent the morning

teaching Elementary Latin and Elementary Mathematics to the younger boys, and discovered that the occupation could be full of interest. He saw nothing of Doyly, and wondered if the boy went to any of Winter's classes. Lunch ; and there was Doyly standing in proud possession of his place by Winter's chair, before anyone could oust him. Winter was late, entering after Grace, and Tony saw Doyly bantering him. A ludicrous sentence shaped itself, unasked, in his head : " Well, I haven't had a chance to fire any of my guns yet."

The afternoon was hot with a mid-September sun, inviting to cricket rather than to football. But the Michaelmas term yielded no jot of its claim to football, and by two o'clock the boys were all gathered in the West Room, where they were being sorted by Mr. Sugden into three " Games," a " Senior Game," a " Middle," and a " Junior." Mr. Sugden expounded it all to Tony.

" The unfortunate Master on Duty takes the Junior Game, as it's the most harassing task ; that's *La Motte*. I like, whenever possible, for the Junior Masters to ' change ' and play with the Senior boys. So you and Winter'll look after the Seniors, will you ? Perhaps you and Winter'll pick up from them."

" Good ! " thought Tony, for his thoughts were independent of his will. " I shall have my chances during football."

Winter tossed a coin and won : he deliberately picked a tall boy named Crosbie, though Doyly had palpably put himself forward to be chosen, and was now looking anxious lest Mr. O'Grogan should pick him. But Tony, after asking advice, picked a powerful young creature called Rogers. Doyly, much relieved, laid himself in front of Winter's eyes again, but with no success ; Winter selected another. Doyly muttered his disappointment, and turned his anxious eyes towards Tony.

" Doyly," called Tony.

With a grimace of philosophic acceptance, Doyly marched to the new master's side.

" Not long," went Tony's autonomous thinking. " It'll be a different story soon."

The sides selected, they ran out excitedly to the playing-field. Over it lay a brilliant sunlight in which the birds were rejoicing with competitive songs. In a few seconds that which had been an empty meadow was dotted with running boys, whose red-and-yellow shirts and flashing white knees heightened its greenness. The singing of the birds withdrew behind the

noisier shouting of the boys, and the pounding of the ball, which flew low sometimes, and high sometimes, and once so high that none could see it, for the sun was looking at it too. It thumped and pounded again, drawing after it a riot of red-and-yellow shirts, and the racing white shirts of Winter and Tony, and even the black monument of Mr. Sugden, who had come to bless the opening of the game—a ball—a ball dancing and bouncing on the grass—the one Pied Piper that draws all Englishmen at a run to its music.

Everywhere light, and liveliness, and sparkling air! Tony, feeling the breeze break on his knees and his naked throat, and pass through his hair, was lifted to a keenness, a restlessness, a breath-taking impatience to be away and about with the game. Come on! Come on! Let's get started. He felt charged with energy, bursting with goals; confident that he could play this game against its kings.

The two young masters placed the men.

"Where do you generally play, Doyly?" asked Tony.

"Inside Right, sir."

"Well, you'll have to put up with a pretty awful Outside Right, because if I can play anywhere in this infantile game, which I doubt, it's there. Keep me properly fed, and I'll feed you."

"Right you are, sir!"

They had started. Tony ran up and down his wing, shouting instructions to his side. Now his full-back had sent the ball with a powerful kick far ahead of him, and he was racing for it, with a speed no other pair of legs on the field could equal. Tony had been known for speed and deftness on the Rugger fields of St. Paul's, and, though he was strictly no Soccer player, these qualities clothed him now (to the easy worship of boys) with the glitter of an International. His foot met the ball just before Winter, the opposing full-back could take it; and with a neat feint, he had outwitted Winter and was racing for the goal. He heard the voice of Doyly, his Inside Right, shouting: "Oh, good, sir, *good!* Well played, I say! . . . Oh, played, sir! *Played!*" Easily he might have run towards the centre and scored, but instead he looked behind, passed the ball to Doyly, and cried, "Shoot, kid! Shoot!" Doyly immediately shot the ball fifteen feet wide of the goal. A groan from his own side met a shout from the other, and all walked back for the goal-keeper's kick, the younger boys debating

whether or not the new master "could be an International if he liked."

Ten and a dozen times this happened: a rush by the new master down his wing; some skilful footwork that left his opponents standing; and merry cheers from the boys behind. Every time did he hold back from scoring, and transfer the ball to his Centre Forward or his Inside Right; and twice did Doyly, now much excited, score from the pass. There was little room in Tony's mind for any remembrance of his contest with Winter, but once when a cannon-ball shot from his own foot sent the ball through the goal-posts, and past the goal-keeper who had no hesitation about dodging it instead of meeting it, and a great part of the way towards Wolstonbury, and when Doyly screamed with joy and laughter, and the smaller boys behind did Indian war dances, the thought peeped, "I'm outgunning him this afternoon."

"By gad, sir," said Doyly, when they were walking back to the centre line, after this murderous goal. "I thought you said you couldn't play Soccer."

"Nor I can. I'm a Rugger player."

"Well, you're better than any master we've ever had."

"Stuff!" demurred Tony.

When the game was over, the enthusiastic Doyly, with three goals out of six to his account, walked back at the new master's side; he wanted to talk about the game. But Tony, giving a quick glance behind, saw Winter strolling home alone, and Pity halted him. He waited for his colleague to come up and join them. And Doyly, seeing Winter and remembering his existence, went immediately towards him, in sorrow for his neglect, and with that attractive affectionateness, so like a girl's. But the automatic register in Tony, working despite his interdiction, recorded that the capture of Doyly's allegiance would be none too difficult an operation, did he choose to advance. The very first assay had carried the outer works.

That night he chanced to be in the passage outside the classrooms just before the elder boys would be dismissed to bed. He waited a minute that he might say good night to Doyly, but there was no sound as of the boys preparing to come out, so he told himself to pursue his road to the Common Room. But he was powerless to move from the passage. He looked at the pictures on the wall, studied the newel of the staircase, and trifled with some exercise books lying on a hall table. Twice

and thrice he bade himself begone, but still stayed. What was he waiting for? He hardly knew. . . . To say good night to Doyly, away from the eyes of Winter? . . . He supposed so—and unspeakably silly it sounded. . . . Yet why? Why? . . . How could one control the longings of one's heart? They went their way, laughing at one's efforts at direction.

And then Doyly emerged with a troop of other boys, and, seeing him, ran up to say good night.

“Oh . . . good night, Doyly,” answered Tony, feigning surprise. And, taking the boy's hand, he gave it a pressure that would hint at his dawning affection. He knew his subject; for Doyly flushed a little, looked eagerly into his eyes, and returned the pressure with a significance unmistakable. He even hung on to Tony's hand when it was for drawing itself away. Tony's heart leapt.

CHAPTER III

DARKNESS IN THE CORRIDOR

TONY was interested and happy at Stratton Lye. He liked to wander, when his work was done, in the roads and lanes, and watch the game of racing shadows which the clouds played on the long green bareness of the downs; or to cycle at an angle towards these hills and to see how they changed their shapes as he drew nearer and nearer along the winding road; to see a smooth and gentle face becoming a high shoulder, and a steep escarpment swinging into an easy gradient, and Wolstonbury lifting its breast, like a proud chief at the head of his column. Strangely moved, he would exclaim aloud: "There's nothing quite like them—nothing!" Or he would clamber alone to the top of Wolstonbury, and look down upon the whole weald, and see the last sunlight on the slants of tillage and pasture and on the roundness of the trees.

He liked the boys; he liked the work of teaching them and the duty of playing with them; he liked Winter and Browning and La Motte; and he was amused by, and consequently not without a fondness for, Mr. Sugden. And no one was to know that this general happiness had been given the one needful light. No one was to know that his thoughts were lit, in the daytime and the night time, by the drama of forging a link between Doyly and himself.

Winter had had no chance against the varied artillery that Tony, almost unwillingly, had arrayed against him. The new master, having won the enthusiastic suffrages of the boys by his performances on the football field, by his entertaining lessons in the class-rooms, and by the stories he would tell them on Sunday walks, so that they quarrelled to walk at his side,

had but to disclose his favouritism to Doyly, occasionally to withdraw it, and then to vouchsafe it again, for the boy to accept it with delight, be jealous of its possession, and come seeking it when he thought it had slipped away. Winter accepted his loss, and as he was of coarser make than Tony, probably felt it less than his supplanter would have done. "Frank has a craze for you now," he said, one Sunday afternoon when they returned from a walk with the boys; and Tony, reddening, replied: "What rot! He likes us all."

Though ashamed of his submersion in the game, he would sometimes wonder why. How could there be anything wrong in it? As Winter had once said, the thoughts that gave him the greatest pleasure were those of doing the boy service, of stirring up his intellect and maturing his taste, of being a power for good whom he would remember in later years. Surely love, wheresoever and howsoever it lifted its face, must be a good thing.

And yet to no one—not even the most sympathetic and least conventional judgment in the world—could he have told some of the hidden pastimes which his game involved. Could he have told that at evening time when, not being on duty, he was free to take a walk in the country roads, he would escape before Winter or Browning could suggest himself as a companion, so that he might indulge long thoughts of his pupil; and that in the hours when he dressed himself for football or church, he had the admiring eyes of Doyly in mind; or that at night when the elder boys were just getting into bed, he would pass along the passage humming, so that Doyly might hear him and rush out, as he often did, with his "Good night, sir," and then in the silence and half-dark of the passage he would give and receive from the boy that significant pressure of the hand?

To stage in imagination dramatic scenes in which he plunged to Doyly's rescue, or stood loyally by the boy when all the world ostracized him—was it, or was it not, contemptible? Ninety-nine out of a hundred people would certainly laugh such imaginings to scorn, but which of them had not done precisely the same thing when a single person reigned in their minds?

Of only one of his moods was he confident that a wrongness flushed it. He was worried to learn again that, as in the days of little Wavers, the thought of punishing Doyly was a pleasant thought, not lightly to be driven away. Stories he had read of kindly and popular masters punishing boys,

and then with a swift change to gentleness converting their resentment into gratitude—some similar experiences of his own at Colet Court and St. Paul's—came into his mind and stayed there assertively. He thrust the thought into duress; but as so often happens, the pent dream, when an opportunity presented itself, sprang out and shaped into action, before he knew what was happening.

It was one evening during Preparation. Tony, as Master on Duty, was sitting in a leisurely attitude at his table. The boys were working before him, the younger at smaller desks in front, the elder at larger desks behind. The silence was disturbed only by the scratching of nibs, the rustle of book-pages, and the occasional shuffling of feet. Tony's glance falling on the bent head of Doyly, he judged from the movement of the boy's pen that he was not writing but drawing. He kept him under observation, and saw him pass his completed drawing to his neighbour, Rogers, with a suppressed giggle. Rogers grinned and passed the paper to the next boy, Chapman, who, grinning in his turn, was about to do the same friendly office for his neighbour, when Tony addressed him :

"Chapman, don't pass it on. Bring it up to me instead."

Chapman, glancing up, pretended an ignorance of the master's meaning; and Tony spoke sharply.

"Don't gape like a fool. Bring that paper to me."

Reddening, the boy stepped out of his desk, walked to the master's table, and laid down the paper. Tony picked it up. It held a crude representation of all four masters sitting in the Common Room; their mortar-boards and gowns hung on hooks by the door, the clock showed the hour to be eight o'clock, the moon through the window suggested that it was night, and below was written :

The Saints of God, their wanderings done,
No more their weary course they run,
O happy saints, for ever blest,
In that dear home how sweet your rest.

Tony compressed his smile, and said : "This is your work, Doyly, isn't it?"

"Yes, sir."

There was too much promptness about his answer to please Tony, too much confidence in his master's easiness, too little apology.

"All right," he said unsmilingly. "Then you had better come up here instead of Chapman."

Doyly, perceiving at once the unexpected hardness in the voice, exchanged places with Chapman; and, at the same time, his confident air retired in favour of a grinning foolishness.

"This is a very fine picture," said Tony, after examining it thoughtfully. "I suppose you have devoted the last half-hour to it."

Doyly had no answer beyond his awkward grin.

"Well, you'll admit," continued Tony, "that you owe me a half-hour of work, in addition to which you deserve half-an-hour's punishment for disturbing your neighbours. I imagine it'll take you about an hour to learn by heart the first fifty lines of your *Æneid*, Book VI. I will hear you say them to-morrow. Thank you. Go to your seat."

It was a severe punishment, as Tony saw, immediately he had announced it; the conning of fifty difficult Latin lines would certainly pack a good hour; but he resolved that he would not retreat from what he had said; and to establish himself in such a punishment, chose to think very seriously of Doyly's offence, and to endorse his own justice in showing no favouritism.

Doyly's face heated with surprise and rising anger.

"Fifty lines, sir?"

"Yes. Fifty lines. That was what I said."

"I can't do that in an hour, sir."

"Then do it in two."

"But you said——" began the boy.

"Go to your seat, and don't argue."

Flourishing sullenness like a flag—muttering a declaration of war—Doyly turned about and walked towards his place while Tony, rather weakly, began to justify his anger further. "I don't like boys who when they've had their fun and are found out, begin to bleat."

Round came Doyly's face and the flash of his eyes.

"I'm *not* bleating." There was no "sir" now.

Tony took no notice, but ostentatiously opened a book and read. He felt hot and unreasonably eager to utter stinging words; and withal, happy, alive, exulting. Why was it always an exultant hour when you were quarrelling with the person you liked? Why was it certain that Doyly, in his surging vindictiveness, felt happy, alive and exultant too?

Why did both know that they meant more to each other than ever, now that had they squared up for battle?

Mr. Sugden had instructed Tony to hear the "Latin Repetition" of the elder boys at the close of Preparation, so, at eight o'clock, he summoned them to stand in a row before him and recite "*O fons Bandusiæ, splendidior vitro.*" Doyly took his place sulkily in the row, and when his turn came to recite the ode, muttered three lines and petered out into silence.

"Go on," said Tony quietly.

"I can't."

"Why?"

"Because I don't know it, I suppose."

Tony was cool now, and remembered that there were times when cold water was more painful than hot.

"I'm sorry. I'll secure you a few quiet moments to learn it, when Preparation is over. I will stay here and help you."

There was a strange allurements in the prospect of holding the boy imprisoned, and playing in an empty class-room this game of quiet master and rebellious pupil.

When, five minutes later, he announced to the other boys that they could go, Doyly rose to go too, as if he declined to take seriously his master's suggestion that he stayed behind and learned the ode.

Sharp as a sergeant's command shot Tony's words: "*Sit down, Doyly!*"

It overawed Doyly, who sat down. The boys filed out, and they were alone.

Doyly's head was bowed over his book; not once did he look up, and Tony was free to stare at that favourite head and savour with pleasure the rebellions that were seething there. The clock on the wall, from being unheeded, now became a major presence, ticking away the minutes, with a noisy indifference to the conflict beneath its gaze. When fifteen of these minutes had been ticked and dismissed, Tony, acting an ignorance of his victim's rebellion, called pleasantly:

"Let me see if you can repeat that ode now, Doyly."

With an obedience insolently mechanical, Doyly rose heavily from his seat, approached the table, and stood there, wordless.

"Fire away," commanded Tony, maintaining his offensive high spirits.

"*O fons Bandusiæ, splendidior vitro. . .*" Doyly recited

the same three lines, his parrotry boldly underlined. At the end of the third line he stopped, and stared at the wall ahead.

"You don't seem to know it yet."

"No."

"How is that?"

"I don't know."

Looking at the sullen, averted face, Tony told himself that he had never liked it so well. "You wouldn't trouble to fight anyone else but me," he thought. And he decided that a swift change from sarcasm to kindness might be ventured now.

"Aren't you being rather foolish, Frank?"

No answer, but perhaps a swelling beneath Doyly's averted eyes.

"Why not learn it, my boy, and get it over?"

For an instant Doyly turned his eyes towards his master's face, as if he were about to surrender; and a lesser insight than Tony's might have guessed that the boy was longing to rush back into the mutual favouritism which he loved, and to find it deepened by this quarrel. But sullenness had rooted quick and tightly, and was not to be dislodged at the first prod of the weeding hook; so he turned his eyes adrift again, to stare unresponsively at the maps on the wall.

"You persist in being a mule, then?"

A silence; reminding Tony of his own dumbness before the masters at Colet Court; flattering him with the thought that his rôle was now changed from pupil to master.

"Come along, old man; let's do it together, and forget all about it."

"I'd do it if it were fair," said Doyly suddenly.

"*Fair!* What do you mean?"

The boy conceded no explanation.

"Now, Doyly, I should be perfectly justified in doubling your imposition for that piece of impudence, but I won't put more on the mule's back that he can bear. Sit down and learn that ode. I shall return at Prayer-time, and hear it. If you don't know it then, we can easily pursue our efforts in our spare time to-morrow."

With the same mechanical action which so successfully robbed obedience of its essential quality and converted it into mutiny, Doyly returned to his seat; and Tony, parading his ease and good spirits, walked out of the door, closing it on a prisoner. At Prayer-time, as he expected, the rebel proffered

no more of the ode than before. Deciding to swing back to anger, Tony looked with a set jaw into the boy's face. He met a gaze that was now addressed defiantly to his own, as a sword-point stares at a sword-point. And there was a pink flush on Doyly's forehead.

"This knot gets tighter, doesn't it?" said Tony. "It looks as though it will need a cane to cut it. . . . Good night."

Doyly's eyes threw to him, for a good night, the sharpest stiletto that savagery could whet. It pierced Tony with delight.

Between Tony and any other of the boys, that threat of a flogging could have meant no more than a report to Mr. Sugden and a request for the intervention of his cane, since it was no custom of the assistant masters to administer corporal punishment. But to Tony and Doyly, who knew that their relationship had passed beyond the commonplace traffic of schoolmaster and schoolboy into a region where both could trust that their movements would be for ever secret to themselves, the words had suggested a liquidation of the debt in a private caning administered by Tony. And as that evening wore on, Tony, blinding his own insight which might have whispered uncomfortable truths, persuaded himself that in such a proceeding there could be found an adjustment that would satisfy the honour of both; he would offer to the boy, when his rebellion should be melting, the choice of three cuts with the cane as an alternative to his heavy impositions; and Doyly, who was as histrionic as most boys, would see at once which was the picturesque road and take it unhesitatingly, preening himself on his fortitude. Tony read Doyly perfectly, because Doyly was so like what he himself had been as a boy.

In the morning at breakfast Doyly, who had recently fought for and conquered a seat at the new master's side, most ostentatiously went to his old place on the left of Winter, and there talked and laughed noisily. And when the meal was over he made it his task to be seen of Tony, hanging on Winter's arm. "Little ass!" laughed Tony to himself, much gratified at these patent snubs. In the half-hour before Classes, in the Break, in the half-hour before Lunch, Doyly persisted in his sullenness, marching obediently into the class-room, but learning nothing of the ode; and all the while Tony, acting

no less, flaunted before Doyly his occupation with a hundred matters much more important than a pupil's sulks.

It was after lunch, when all the other boys had gone out to football, that he made his move.

"Come here, Doyly," he called to the only boy left in the room. And Doyly, a machine without a will, came and stood before him.

"You want to go out and play football with the others too, don't you, Frank?"

"Not particularly."

"Oh yes, you do. Well, hadn't we better see how we can solve our little trouble? I understand, old man, exactly what you're feeling; you don't want to give in, and nor do I. It's all very natural."

Tears were embarrassing Doyly's eyes, and he had no way to deny them, except by bringing his face round to his master's, and letting a smile break at the lips.

"Well, Doyly, we must put an end to this frowsty staying in-doors over a book. I'll make a fair offer to you: would you prefer to take from me three strokes of the cane, instead of your impositions? If you like to do that, I'll consider all our accounts squared. . . . I can't doubt which alternative a boy of your calibre'll choose. What do you say, Doyly?"

Yes, Tony had read his man well: Doyly, pleased with the compliment, and eager to play the heroic rôle, replied brightly: "Of course, sir, I'll take the caning."

"I thought you would," said Tony approvingly. "Go then and wait in the Third Form class-room."

"Yes, sir." And with the smartness of a soldier who goes fearlessly to the firing squad, he walked out of the room.

After allowing a few minutes to pass, Tony strolled into the lobby and took his cane from the masters' hatstand. The deeper parts of him, which were in protest against his actions, had no chance just now of rising above the strange pleasure that occupied his mind. What was there wrong in this proceeding? Nothing. Rather was there generosity and understanding in it, as Doyly had immediately seen. Only a foolishly introspective person like himself would notice this strange enjoyment and worry about it; a normal person would be satisfied with his skilful management of a difficult, if affectionate, pupil. With his cane in his hand, he entered the Third Form class-room.

The afternoon sun was slanting on to the walls through the tall windows ; and the voices of the footballers and the whistling of the referees came floating over their lowered sashes. A breeze lifted a blind and slacked it again, so that its acorn beat sleepily on the glass ; and a trail of clematis, tumbled from the trellis work above, peeped against a pane, like an eavesdropper. Why the sunlight, and the happiness of the voices and the peace of the swaying clematis should deject Tony he could not say ; nor must he betray any malaise now. Doyly, with his hands in his pockets, was looking out of a window at a bird on the lawn ; and he turned round, on his master's entrance, and formed with his lips a suppressed grimace, in humour's cause. And Tony, in a manner supremely natural and friendly, said :

" We'll get through this quickly, Frank. Bend over that desk."

A shade paler, the boy obeyed. He obeyed with promptness lest he should appear afraid.

Sharply came the cane's first cut—so sharply that Doyly quivered. And Tony, seeing that quiver, caught his breath in an instant sympathy. Shame sent the blood to his brow, where a moisture broke. The next two cuts were formal—no more.

Maintaining his affectation of merriness and ease, he said : " There ; that's over, Frank, and thank goodness. Our accounts are all square now."

Doyly straightened himself and smiled his gratitude. It was certain that *he* was feeling nothing except a gratification with himself and a deeper affection for his master ; Doyly, at all events, would never see in this incident aught of what Tony was seeing ; he would have forgotten it in an hour's time, or would recall it only with satisfaction.

But not so Tony. By sustained effort he flew all that afternoon his flag of naturalness and good spirits. He talked gaily with Doyly and the other boys, when they walked back from the football field ; and none of them knew that it was a strain for him to hold his thoughts on the surface, and not to sink them into profound questionings.

But when Tea was over and he was free, he hurriedly took his stick and escaped from Stratton Lye for a walk alone. And soon he found that he had left the houses and cottages behind him and was following a meadow track towards the Downs. The sun, dropping beside the western-

most reach of the downs, was washing their cheeks with colour and filling their folds with shadow. Wolstonbury, round as the top of a world, loomed ahead of him, with all its surface, save for one wedge of light, mantled in a dark serenity; Wolstonbury, quiet, self-sufficient, contemplative, and remote from the bewilderments of the men at its foot. Angry tears could have spurted to his eyes; his distaste for the afternoon's memory, now free to enlarge, had lifted and swelled till it became a sick disgust with himself—a disgust that so rejoiced in its complete triumph that it would allow no validity to countering arguments, but bore them down with oaths, giving quarter to none. "Oh *damn ! damn !* Why did I do it ? Why, when I care for the boy . . . ? *Damn !*" The oath, bursting aloud from him every time he faced the memory, became at last rhythmic and melancholy, and he would accompany it with angry swishes at the tall yellow grasses. For a moment, as his cane lopped off a head, he had a fancy to snap the weapon savagely in pieces, as a violent ratification of his "Never again !" But he refrained, for a part of his disgust was with all fine scenes that his imagination staged. The thought came to him: "Well, there it is ! Why worry ? What's done can't be undone, and I suppose we've all got things in our past that we should be ashamed to tell to a living soul. . . . Why are we made like this ?" But he refused the comfort of excuses and extenuations, and, running over the old words: "Why did I do it ? *Why ?*" walked on and on, his worry unhealed.

CHAPTER IV

HOME AGAIN

THE memory of this day, washing like an acid over Tony's affection for Frank Doyly, graved it deep. Dwelling again and again on his surrender to the disquieting things that muddy our human love, he would exclaim: "No, dammit, no! I don't want to hurt Frank. I want to help him, and to give much to him."

And in this idea of helping Doyly he discovered both a balm for his conscience and a pleasant pastime. On the football field he gave pains—rather noisy pains—to training the boy; in the Preparation Room he helped him with his Latin Elegiacs and Greek Conditional Sentences (not averse to showing that, though he took only a junior form, he was more than master of these senior subjects), and he knew that he disentangled the boy's difficulties with a lucidity and sympathy above that of Browning and La Motte, since his imagination and youthful keenness were brighter than theirs; and on Sunday walks, when the loyal Frank was hooked on to his arm, he would talk for hours of the passages in literature that delighted him, while Frank, ever ready to take fire at enthusiasm, would sparkle with pleasure when he understood, and rumple his brow with frustrated desire when he was failing to understand.

Doyly had no talent for speaking aloud of the affection he obviously felt. But, so odd and English was his make-up, he was as ready to show it by actions as he was shy of mentioning it in words. He had never any hesitation in fighting to walk by Mr. O'Grogan's side, or in emerging from his dormitory to say a second good night, if he heard Tony's voice in the passage; but he drew back from the language of affection, preferring the language of impudence and mock-rebellion. That he wanted his affection told, but by other lips than his, was proved one day when Tony lifted from the tray in the hall a letter in an

unrecognized hand. He opened it curiously, and turning first to the signature, read the name of Doyly's father.

"Dear Sir (the father had written),

"My boy, Frank Doyly, is very enthusiastic about 'the new master,' and writes in almost every letter to tell us of the great pains you have taken with his work and games. My wife and I feel we should like to thank you for this, and to assure you that Frank himself is more than grateful. Perhaps the simplest way to assure you of this is to quote the following sentence from the latest letter of this odd youth: 'I often wish,' he writes, 'that I could tell him that I am frightfully pleased, and all that sort of thing, but it would sound so silly, wouldn't it?' Why it should sound silly is not as clear as the sunlight to us, but perhaps that is because we are getting old and have forgotten what it was like to be thirteen . . ."

Tony always counted the arrival of this letter as one of the richer moments of his life.

He returned home to learn from the busy lips of Keatings, Joyce and Peggy, whose indolent pens had told him nothing, a full tale of some remarkable changes in the lives of two of the family—Joyce and Derek. In enlarging on these changes Joyce's lips were the most active, while Derek's were not active at all; nor even present, for the most part, because Derek seldom took his seat in the Family parliament. Joyce had "started on her own," she said, "as a free-lance Lady Journalist." She had her own typing paper, headed: "Joyce Duveen, The Authority on Women's Affairs," and on this she typed "bright and attractive pars" for half a dozen of the most popular London dailies. These were paid for and even commissioned, but the similar leaves which she scattered on the penny weeklies, such as *Home Talk* and *The Gossip* and *Queries* were less successful; some of them dropped into safe resting places, but many of them floated out of her sight and were heard of no more. Still, she was making better money than the pound a week, at which the *Chiswick* and *Gunnersbury Times* had valued her pen.

The Women's Affairs, on which, with no justice whatever, she had announced herself to be the Authority, consisted, it seemed, in information about the private lives of the great. She attended what she called "functions;" four, five, or six

of them a day; and seeking out the celebrities in the room, made them sit by her side and deliver up to her notebook their habits, their hobbies, their past and future movements, and any of their domestic secrets that might be marketable. "Please—please—you must give me a story," she would protest, and she would put an expectant pencil to her lips in a way that was quite irresistible—or so she said. "It's a blood-sucking business, certainly, but hugely jolly, and I'm hugely good at it."

The celebrities whose blood was most saleable, said Joyce, were Society Ladies and Literary Men. Bishops and Archdeacons went well, but not Deans, and no clergy of lesser title. "Can't sell the ungaftered at all!" Criminal lawyers were brisk, but not such a good line as Criminals. Indeed, she'd put murderers at the top of the list, only there were so few of them, unfortunately. No, Society and its fauna were the kind of malarial country which bred such pestilent mosquitoes as herself. Only draw the blood of a Duchess or a Marchioness, and you could spend its proceeds before you had even posted it to the newspaper. Which was partly right (maintained Joyce, with a sideways nod) because these ladies were distinctly press-shy and difficult to conquer. Whereas the literary men—ah, the literary men were a very different story.

"Oh, I've taken some jars! It's been the biggest shock of my journalistic career. There's no difficulty with most authors, children; if you don't go and hover about them, bless their sweet little hearts, they come and hover about you. People whose names in my childhood stood only one degree below God's I now draw to my side with no greater effort than a parade of my notebook and my pencil. Up they come, bursting with information about their forthcoming books. Yes, Family: they come and seek *me* now! Sometimes I'm half afraid they'll queue up. But they're rather sweet with their pretence that they don't care for publicity, so I do what I can for them. I hope I've helped one or two. And they sell well—that's the funny thing. Nobody'd want to read about them if they could see them, and yet they sell next best to the murderers and the duchesses. And here's another funny thing: with Women's Suffrage all the noise, you'd think that the Authority on Women's Affairs ought to do a big trade in the private lives of the Suffragettes, wouldn't you? but they don't sell at all. It's only their public lives that are marketable, and of course the reporters have netted all that. For every Suffragette

I sell to a Woman's paper, I could get rid of half a dozen male novelists, and oh, three dozen duchesses. And, of course, Royalty, if only you could get them . . ." she added wistfully.

But if Joyce wanted to discourse on her own activities, Keatings and Peggy were more eager to tell the mystery of Derek. And Joyce, once she saw that this secondary, but quite interesting, topic had displaced her own, accepted the disappointment and launched her chatter into the new waters with an eagerness no less than her brother's and sister's. Derek, they explained, had quarrelled with his Headmaster, resigned his post, and steamed for home, with all the flags of his *amour propre* flying high on the mast. "So he says, but he most probably got the sack," suggested Keatings, over his pipe.

"No, he didn't," Peggy denied. "He told the Headmaster what he thought of him, and gave notice straight away."

"That's the way he puts it."

"Well, why not believe him?" Peggy pouted.

"Because," Keatings submitted, "he's a born liar."

"He isn't! He's much too proud to tell lies. He's got more character than any of you."

"That's true, thank God. Character in such quantities becomes uncomfortable for everybody."

"It means he isn't a liar, at any rate."

"Oh, he doesn't *know* that he lies, poor lad. That's his weakness; he persuades himself that he's done something very fine, and misrepresents facts accordingly."

Peggy rustled with annoyance. "I can't see why you shouldn't believe that what he says is true. After all, he's ours, and the Headmaster isn't." Always Peggy's resolve to believe in her family was a little like her struggle to accept the dogmas of her Church; she believed—and prayed the Family to help her unbelief.

Keatings turned to Tony.

"You must understand that Peggy's going through a period of adoration for Derek. But it can't last."

"And she's only doing it," Joyce explained, "because she's having a highly religious season just now, and thinks she ought to love everybody she detests."

"Idiots!" said Peggy, flushing.

"Yes, but what's Derek doing now?" asked Tony, anxious to recover the main point.

Joyce looked at Keatings, and Peggy looked at Joyce and Keatings, and both girls broke into laughter.

"No one knows," said Joyce. "He goes out after breakfast every morning, and he seems to have more money in his pocket than can have been honestly come by, but if you try to get out of him what his job is, he only grins."

"He's a fool," Keatings pronounced.

"Fool or not, he's making money," said Peggy.

"Oh, yes," agreed Keatings. "That type does."

"But what do you *think* he's doing?" persisted Tony.

"I've my suspicions," Keatings began; but before he could uncurtain them, Joyce intruded *her* suggestion; she whispered it, as if it were a suggestion of murder.

"I think he's money-lending."

"No." Keatings shook his head. "No. It's not that, though doubtless he'll take to that soon."

"Well, he dresses up to the eyebrows. Is he a shopwalker, do you think?"

"God, no! Nothing so *déclassé* and honest as that."

"Well, what is it? What's *your* suspicion?"

Keatings knocked out his pipe and began to fill it, teasing her with delay.

"Oh, *what*, confound you!" she demanded impatiently.

"I think it's Daylight Burglary." Having offered this, Keatings put a match to his pipe, and added between his puffs: "He's a gentleman cracksman. Yes, I'm sure of it."

"Oh, how ripping!" cried Joyce. "But no, that's not my idea."

"Well, what's yours?"

Joyce's mouth took the first steps towards a mischievous smile, but fell back to solemnity again. Her eyes stared with admirable gravity into the trouble ahead.

"I'm afraid—I'm dreadfully afraid," she said, "that it's the White Slave Traffic."

That Joyce, in her new adventuring with her notebook, was happy, and that Keatings, in his quiet, undistinguished work at the Insurance Office, was not unhappy, Tony saw; but he was less satisfied about Peggy's happiness. All her smiles were decorative and obliging rather than sincere, and her high spirits had none of the naturalness of Joyce's, and perished much quicker. She would sink easily into her own depths, and,

when charged with it by the others, would come to the surface with a flush, a smile, and a radiant denial.

"Peggy has all the symptoms of a Secret Sorrow," said Tony to Keatings and Joyce.

"It's probably Derek," suggested Keatings.

But it was not Derek. It was simply that she was let and hindered in the current lap of her spiritual race. Peggy had discovered soon after their arrival in Chiswick, a church, distant not three-quarters of an hour in the bus, where the ceremonial was so richly suggestive, the music so luxuriously soothing, and the pious gestures and posturing of the congregation so satisfying if you quietly copied them, and the vestments of the clergy so flattering to them, and the idea of calling these kindly ascetics "Father" such a last irresistible attraction that she longed to surrender herself to these things with a perfect understanding and the serenest faith. And her sin was that she had promptly surrendered to them, but with the most imperfect understanding and without a speck of serenity in her faith. It had been a pure dive into self-gratification, and she had the spiritual vision to see this.

Last Easter Sunday Keatings had wandered into its High Mass, curious to see this church of Peggy's. And there had been "Hail, Festal Day!" carried round the church with trumpets and incense, and with cantors and copes and dalmatics and tunics; and an orchestra up in a gallery had accompanied some extraordinary performances in front of the altar with Gounod's "Messe Solennelle;" and the whole congregation had more than once succumbed to the floor, leaving Keatings upright and conspicuous, and when he had copied them rather than feel a fool, they had all risen again and left him kneeling; and at the end of the service Peggy, delighted to see her brother there (he had not been difficult to see), had rushed up to inquire how he had liked it.

Keatings who had a marked talent for summing up a complex impression in a sentence, replied: "I'm going home to get a plain dry biscuit." And Peggy, to her discomfort, was conscious of her immediate intellectual agreement.

Then Joyce insisted that she must come too, and on Low Sunday she watched it all from a seat by the West Door. The impressions she brought away dealt mainly with the clergy; the tall, middle-aged Senior Assistant Priest, Father Saffery, who had entered from the rainy street with an Inverness cape

over his cassock, so that he appeared to be hung about with three skirts, she styled "The All-Weather Model," and the young chubby-faced Junior Priest, Father Williams, she described as the "Good-with-Men-and-Lads-one." Peggy sank into further thought.

What a curse was her clear spiritual vision! Others could have settled themselves into the lap of such a church if it soothed them, and could have been happy there, and because happy, good. But not she: she was conscious of a hundred falsities; she knew that her fervid, well-documented, sometimes insulting advocacy of the church's usages, were acted things; she knew, too, that just as a man, who is aware of his financial insolvency but conceals it, might involve himself in deeper and deeper waters, so she, who was horribly conscious of her spiritual insolvency but had covered it with this fine costume of logical conviction and proselytizing zeal, was swimming on sadly into desperate seas; for it was now Christmas time, and all the Church's best members were going to their confession, and she would certainly have to go too. Yes, she must go, for how could she, who had contended against all comers in defence of the Sacrament of Penance, and had even, when hard put to it and rather heated, declared her certainty that it was divinely ordained—how could she diverge from its terrors and slip round it unvisited? So she swam hopelessly on; she who could hardly keep afloat swam on in the costume of a champion, towards this disaster.

And to think of all that she would have to confess in the dreadful hour! Under such spiritual limelights as hers the smallest sin threw a well-marked shadow, and all—all would have to be confessed, else would the confession itself be a sin with a shadow like a mountain's. She would have to speak out all her hypocrisy, and her persistence in it; she would have to say: "I have only come to Confession to-day because I knew it was expected of me and I was afraid not to. I don't know that I really believe in it at all. In fact, I am not at all sure that I am not committing another sin in coming to you like this. When in the *confiteor* just now I said that I confessed 'to all saints, and to you, Father,' I fancy I added another sin to be confessed, because I am not at all sure, really, what I think about the saints. By my hypocrisy, by my play-acting, by my wilful forcing of my own mind, by the violence I have done to my intellect when arguing with others (it would sound

like a litany) I've got myself into such a state that I no longer know which are the things I really believe and which are those I am pretending to believe. And this confession—I've no idea in which category it comes. Honestly, Father, I think if I cleared my mind of all the fog, I should have to say that I believed—yes, it would be the truth—that a simple confession to God in the privacy of my bedchamber, and a promise to Him that, by way of reparation and amendment, I would never come near this High Church again, would leave me with a much greater feeling of pardon and release than this amazing thing I am doing now."

And difficult, worrying, brow-crumpling as all this was, it was as nothing to a further sin which would surely have to be confessed—though very guardedly and very indirectly. How—in pity, *how* was she to admit that not only had she forced herself into her present Advanced Beliefs, but also she had been forced there by the action of her heart? The matter was thus: after only a few weeks of attendance at the church she had found her thoughts more and more occupied by Father Michael Saffery, the middle-aged but handsome Senior Assistant Priest. And the complication that this unfortunate element introduced into her confession was an extraordinary one; because—explain it who might—or, rather, let no one do so, since the explanation was doubtless horrid—the idea of enumerating her sins and analysing the state of her soul before him was so strangely pleasant that it mingled with her fears a delight which transcended them. Here was a problem that threw a huge cross-shadow, and made confusion indeed!

Of course she might have escaped from this additional worry by arranging to make her confession to one of the other priests whose presence did not quicken her heart-beats at all, nor throw a delight over the whole procedure; and she had finally resolved to do this; only Father Michael had come up to her one day and instructed her, as a neophyte, that she should seek the Sacrament of Penance before Christmas morning, and she, bewildered by his proximity, had said, Yes, certainly, she would be delighted to do so; and when he had asked her what priest she would desire as her Director, her whole heart had, by a sudden *coup*, overthrown conscience and will, so that she had instantly lifted her eyes to him and said, "Oh, *you*, please." And he, saying "Certainly, my child," had made, while her heart raced in disorder, an appointment for noon on the

morning of Christmas Eve. It was all done, and written down in a diary, and committed to his waistcoat pocket before she could say, "No, I didn't mean that. Please—please, I don't want *you*," or think of some less uncivil equivalent.

What was she to do now? Most certainly she had sinned in thus collapsing before a sweet temptation; and most certainly such a sin ought to be confessed and its nature explained if absolution were to be valid—but how? If she were to do real justice to her offending, she ought to say: "When I asked to come and confess my sins to you, I really emptied the confession of all worth by converting it from a misery into a delight. I can only get it back into a misery again by telling you this frankly, but even so, I am not at all sure that it cancels out properly."

But this was not all. Her conscience was fretted by the wholly sinful desire, in which she trapped herself often, that Father Saffery should be impressed by the exhaustive character of her confession and the profound spiritual insight it revealed. Certainly her manuals had taught her that the priest, on these occasions, was no more than an impersonal instrument of the Church, a mere automatic channel of God's grace, but her mind, which could be as acute as her conscience, told her that Father Michael Saffery in the confessional would still be Father Michael Saffery and would know that it was Peggy O'Grogan speaking, and so there must inevitably be a difference in Father Saffery's estimate of Peggy O'Grogan at 12.30 on Christmas Eve from that which he had held at noonday. And she was minded that if he must know all the wickedness in her he should have an eye also for the good; and, meditating on this, she would catch herself preparing the congratulatory words he would address to her: "Before proceeding, my daughter, to counsel and absolution, let me, as the voice of your Mother Church, compliment you on your full and courageous confession. . . ." To have thoughts like this, was it another sin that must in honour be announced? Must she say, "In this confession which I am now concluding, Father, I have been guilty of a strong desire to impress you"?

And if this, the sum of difficulties enveloped in her confession, were not enough to withdraw her from the liveliness of Keatings and Joyce into the fastness of her own thoughts, there was ever with her the sad certainty that she had fallen in love with a priest dedicated to celibacy, who must never—never so much as

suspect the inclination of her heart. She had made a shipwreck of her life.

After protracted meditation in the quiet of her room, she decided, with a sudden shake of the head, that the path of Auricular Confession was entangled enough without the complications introduced by the feet of Father Saffery, and that the only course before her was to escape somehow from her appointment with *him*. It would not be easy, for there was no possibility of explaining her change of front, but there it was : the difficult step ahead of her was her punishment for having yielded so easily to temptation. With no clear idea of what she was going to say, she waylaid the Father next Wednesday night, as he stood at the West Door of the church in his cassock, cape and biretta, after the Service of Preparation for Communicants.

"Excuse me, Father," said she. "May I ask you something?"

He turned to her, while still shaking hands with the ladies and the children who had queued up to bid him good night. "Yes, my child. Will you wait just a minute?"

Peggy stood aside, and gazed at the darkness of the distant chancel where the sacristan had already extinguished the lights. Only one light was glimmering at the end of the arches, the little red lamp that hung before the tabernacle on the Lady altar. And while she waited more lights went down in the nave, so that now there was only one burning from each column, and one over the tower door. The nave was a trough of twilight in which two rows of haloed lamps converged towards the blackness of the chancel. Now the last of the congregation had gone, the sacristan was far up the church, walking between the chair-rows to straighten the disordered hassocks, and Father Saffery was free to turn to her again.

"Well, my child, what is it?" he asked, giving Peggy that smile of especial tenderness which, she sometimes believed, he rested on her alone. As he asked it, he pushed each hand and wrist up the opposite sleeve, and laid the sleeves, thus joined, along the front of his cincture.

Peggy's eyes swung away; and, feeling that his gaze had fixed on her, her wayward blood rushed to her brow and down her neck and throat. Speak she must, but what?

"Please, Father, would you mind if I made my confession to someone else?"

Oh, he was staring at her, not answering her at once : had

she offended him, or had she—worse still, making her colour deeper—had she revealed anything to him?

“Certainly, my child, but why?”

“Oh, I don’t know, but . . .”

No more—she could think of no more to say—what a fool she had made of herself!—why hadn’t she prepared properly a whole chain of lies, even if she had to confess them afterwards to whoever should take his place?—he must be suspecting all—his way of looking at her proved that he was doing so—oh, she must escape from this church and never visit it again—couldn’t she go as a missionary somewhere—to some islands in the Pacific. . . .?

“That’s all right, my child. I’ll ask Father Williams to hear it at the same place and hour.”

“Oh, thank you. . . . You don’t mind terribly, do you . . . ?”

“Oh, no, no. You must seek direction from the person who you think will help you most.”

“Oh, it’s not that, but . . .”

“What is it, then . . . ?”

“Oh, I don’t know. . . . Yes, I’d like Father Williams.”

“Well, that will be all right. I’ll see him about it.”

Peggy put out her hand.

“Good night.”

“Good night, my dear.”

There was a fondness very marked in his holding of her hand, and Peggy carried into the dark streets, and for many miles on the blowy top of a bus, not only her confusion and heat, but the germ of a terrifying happiness.

CHAPTER V

SUMMER TERM

SUMMER again ; summer lying golden under the downs, its sun so high, and beating such a light on the naked hills that they had shadow and substance no longer, but only shape, and waved along the glowing sky like a stream of cloud. The Summer term in possession of Stratton Lye, and burning a tract in Tony's memory that was pleasant for ever. To be nineteen and a pupil no longer but a master, and, moreover, a master of nearly a year's standing ; to be no longer the lips that said " Sir," but the ears that heard that flattering address ; to be nineteen and to smoke one's pipe as openly and unceasingly as forty smokes it, and to lift one's tankard at the inn with the ripest men ; to live in the present and have no more care for the future than nineteen feels ; to have money in one's pocket, not overmuch, but enough to buy cigarettes and effective socks and ties—here were franchises that spread a private joy over Tony's days.

In the Summer term the sun fell slantwise into the Preparation room at eight o'clock at night, and drew one from one's desk to listen to the singing of birds. In the Summer term there were the long evenings of Fielding Practice on the trimmed grass of the cricket field, when he and twenty boys would go out under the falling sun, and the boys would fan out in a wide circle, and Tony would stand in the centre and with his cricket bat smack the ball—than which no more glorious privilege has been allowed to men—to this far-distant fieldsman and that one ; while the boys' voices came back, shouting that it was their turn now, sir, or shrilling the explanation of their failures, or flinging a laughter at other people's. And behind it all would be a smell of mown grass from the corner of the field, where the groundsman had piled it, or the smoke of its slow fire drifting towards the orchard ; and then, as the light failed, the ball would reach his

hand wet with dew, and holding on its surface all the smell and touch of evening.

In the Summer term there were the Cross Country runs, which himself had introduced, with boys as umpires at all the main points in the eight-mile course; when the younger boys would be given their long start, and then the middle group would take off, and then the starred cluster of favourites, and lastly, many minutes later, himself, at a steady, confident, unstraining stride. Nothing quite like this: to run into the soft warm air, naked save for a thin white vest and scanty running shorts; to become conscious of one's rippling muscles as the breeze played on them; to feel the peer of any Olympian Greek; to break across a meadow and turn the eyes of some lonely ploughman and see (as we called it) the "gorblimey!" look therein; to go on through the dancing midges and to indulge for a second a poet's thought: to-night was one not being as simple and wise as they? The umpires at the first base would give him a cheer, and if that base were a low stile he would entertain them and earn a second cheer by taking it at a leap; by the second base he would be near the favourites; by the third he would be among them, chaffing and encouraging the broken-winded, and drawing the survivors on with him to the conquest of those ahead.

And then that walk back into the school buildings, when to a mind such as Tony's, fatigue after exercise presented itself as one of the loveliest things in the world, and therefore as one of the most significant. How exquisite it was—this heaving of one's breast, this intaking of short quick breaths through a mouth that would not close, this cooling of the sweat on forehead and neck as the air touched it coldly, this ache and stiffness settling in the muscles of calf and thigh, this treacherous "give" of the weary knees, this drying and powdering of the earth on his palms, this delicious thought of a long drink, a cold bath, a cigarette, and a succumbing of one's body on to a bed! Tony, lying on his counterpane, girdled only with a towel, the cigarette at his lips and his hands behind his head, would wonder whether the body in these moments shot into men's consciousness a quicker revelation than ever their minds, dulled by too much thought, could place there, of the goodness which was the essence of life. Was Fatigue a mystical ecstasy?

The final brilliance was given to this summer term by the presence in it of the two things which best illuminate men's

days. One of these was artistic creation. Tony was busy on a mighty poem. He had begun to believe, though he faced no ridicule by uttering the belief aloud, that he could be a poet, and a poet in no small way either. Sometimes, when creation was strong in him, he suspected that, in Tony O'Grogan, a great poet had at last appeared in England. So many things could halt him in his path, and send him probing deep for their furthest import. And not only the things that delighted everybody, such as a rose-garden or a sunset—for every man was a poet in the presence of a Gloire de Dijon or on the summit of Wolstonbury at the droop of a fine midsummer night—but everything, everything. As he lay on his bed now, look ! A candle on the table, the ordered pattern of the rug on the floor, the light falling on his carafe of tooth water, the damp and decay in a corner of the room wall, all these, did he care to think about them, could point the thought-road to ideas as ultimate as the mind of man could stand in without vertigo. Was this to be a poet, and different from other men ? Did Mr. Sugden ever walk to the brink of Eternity through his tooth glass, or Cyril Winter tread the road to God by staring at a circle in the pattern of the linoleum ? They did not. Then let him secretly believe in himself ; let him develop the intellectual energy and the physical stamina, and he would write his poetry with the best.

The aspiration had rooted quickly and was now mastering and draining the soil of his mind. He had started on the great poem. Having only one subject that he knew anything about, school life, he was writing, such was his austere devotion to truth, about that. What matter if novelists by the hundred had tooled in this quarry before him ? No one had thought of carving an epic out of it. It was his own idea—absolutely ! A thrilling secret, this. Nonsense to say that the subject had not the magnitude that an epic claimed : old Aristotle was wrong ; the magnitude of a subject depended, not on the exalted rank of its persons or the vastness of its conflicts, but on the poet's vision of their significance. And to get an Iliad out of little subjects was greater than to get it out of the Siege of Troy ; it needed a nobler vision and a more miraculous art. With all the ocean-deep ambition of nineteen Tony was hardly content with a seat at Homer's side ; his thoughts fell covetously on one step higher.

And so creation had commenced. And now it was making

his lonely walks down the shaded roads, when he was off duty, into hours warm with the strain and excitement of mental sport. How he looked forward to these creative walks! There were no times like them; they were the hours best worth living.

And the other thing that lit up his days was the knowledge of his complete capture and occupation of Doyly's mind; and this light was heightened by the suppressed, censored memory that in a few weeks time, with the close of the term, it must be put out for ever. Doyly went to Marlborough next term. But Tony lived in the current happiness, as he had done with Sibyl Chandry, and did not allow himself to think of its end. And Frank Doyly, with his own sidelong thought for the guillotine that must fall at the term's end, was most deliberately proffering the evidences of his worship; never from his lips; but, as a dog or a pony might, with his shoulder and the inclination of his body. On a Sunday walk, only let Tony and Frank drop behind the long straggling flock of boys, so that a corner of beech trunks or a curve of high hedge covered them from their fellows in front, and Frank, hanging on Tony's arm, would lean against him for the six short paces of privacy. Or in church, when all sat themselves for the sermon, Frank, at Tony's side, would accord three minutes to the orator, and then move two inches closer to Tony, who, glancing his way, would see him looking up impudently.

Once on a cross-country run, Frank caught his foot in the mouth of a rabbit burrow, and pitched magnificently into the tussocky grass, and lifting himself with elaborate stage-business, limped to the hedgerow. Was it deliberate? He had certainly staged it when he was twenty yards in front of Tony. Tony fell out of the run to examine the injury.

"Are you hurt, Frank?"

Doyly, in his pain, answered nothing, but with many a grimace and with suitable pauses, limped to a gate some fifty paces distant. There he placed his hands on the top bar and leaned forward, his injured foot pawing on its toe like the hoof of a lamed horse. At last, as he got used to the pain, he bravely threw up his face and tossed back his hair.

"Hurt?" repeated Tony, who had followed.

"Oh, no; it's nothing much, sir. I've sprained my ankle a little, I think. I always think a sprain's rather a topping feeling, don't you?"

"I don't know about that."

"I'm enjoying it awfully, really."

He made a move to sit on the gate, but this involved placing the injured foot squarely on the ground, and such a movement—apparently—was not possible without the vilest suffering.

"Oh, damn!" he said.

"Shut up, Doyly!" commanded Tony.

"Yes, but it hurts," protested Doyly, in justification, and he looked up brightly. "Do you think it's broken?"

"Get on, you boys," ordered Tony, to some of the lazier stragglers who, having seen the accident from their unenthusiastic rear, had begun to run seriously for the first time, and were now gathered round, glad to exchange the doubtful pleasures of a foot-slog over ploughed fields for the delight of gaping at a hospital-case. "Run on. I'll stay with Doyly. Go on. I mean it."

Reluctantly they turned away, and produced a jog-trot to the order of their master; and as they ambled on, they looked back frequently at the entertainment they had forgone. Doubtless, when they were safely round the hedge's curve, they introduced variety into the monotony of a cross-country run by a period of walking.

"Will you be able to limp home all right?" asked Tony of his patient.

"Oh, yes," Doyly opined. "It's getting better already."

"It'll swell up, I expect," Tony sympathized.

"Will it?" Doyly looked a little alarmed. "Do sprains always swell?"

"Of course."

"H'm. . . . Well, I suppose it will then." Doyly, apparently, had decided to hold his fort, with or without ammunition.

"I'll help you back."

The boy got off the gate; and as the foot touched the ground, he bent at the knee and screwed up his face with the anguish of it all.

"*Hell!* I'm sorry, sir. But it hurts like blazes."

"Come on," said Tony encouragingly, putting an arm round his back and under an arm-pit. "We'll manage it all right."

"How far are we from home?" asked Doyly, his brows lifted and his eyes resigned, as he accepted the labour before him.

"About two and a half miles."

"I'll do it." It was a hero's word.

"Come on, then. It'll be getting dark."

"You won't mind going slow, will you, sir?"

"No, no. You set the pace."

They began the homeward journey, Tony's arm supporting Doyle, and Doyle limping rhythmically, grimacing often, and following the grimace with whistles, since he must not swear.

"It'll be better when we get off this rough ground on to the smooth road," Tony promised.

"Will it? I'm glad of that. . . . Is it far to the road?"

"Only about a hundred yards."

"I'll do it."

They passed through a swing gate on to the hard macadam of the Wolstonbury Road.

"Ah, that's better," agreed Doyle. "That's ever so much better."

And after they had gone a few dozen paces in silence, he leaned his body against Tony's, and put an arm ostensibly for support about his waist. Tony understood; and the hand under the boy's arm-pit gave its acknowledgment of pressure. This being the consummation that the boy desired, he said no more; he was quite happy, and Tony was quite happy; there was nothing more to do or to say; once or twice Frank looked up at Tony's profile, and Tony affected not to see this; and thus linked, they walked home together under the darkening trees to Stratton Lye.

It was as the term's last day shortened its distance from them that Tony discerned the change in Doyle's attitude. He read the boy's thoughts as the boy himself could not have done: Doyle, he saw, had realized that his pleasant game of mutual adoration must stop on the term's last day, and, accepting its closure with the ease that was natural to him, had begun already to sink back from adoration to mere friendliness. The summer holidays with their interests were hard at hand, and in the light thrown by their approach, Stratton Lye and Mr. O'Grogan were already fading into figures of the past. And this fading had no wound for him; he just accepted it and acted as common sense demanded, withdrawing from the game and turning his thoughts towards the stretch of holiday and the rise of Marlborough beyond. That there was not a hint of unhappiness about him—this was the sharp point for Tony.

He took it away with him on his solitary walks, and in its company slashed his cane cheerily at the heads of the cow-parsley and the plumes of the tall grasses. "Of course! Whether Frank knew it or not at the time, he was only playing a game. I know—who better?—that it's the pleasantest pastime in the world. He was only playing at it. . . ." As he said it, Tony struck with merry savagery at a frond of bracken, for it was no painless thrust that he was baring his breast to. "Only playing at it. . . . I suppose I was too, but—I don't know—I'm such a poisonous ass that I let it get hold of me too much, till it passes beyond a game. . . ." Did all men deliberately work themselves up into love, and then suffer? Was love never anything but a self-suggested thing? . . . Was it nothing at all, really? Was there no such thing? . . . He would get over this, of course. Next term might hurt a bit, when he saw the class-rooms where they had acted their game together, and the football field, and the gate in the hedgerow where Frank had rested his ankle. But in a month or two he would be cured. Yes, that was what would happen, and therefore he could not really believe in his love—or in his hurt. Self-suggested things. And yet it *did* hurt and ache. . . . Oh, it was all absurd. . . . Men were idiots. . . . idiots; they pretended that love was everything, and it was nothing but auto-suggestion. . . .

But if there was no love, if it was all imagination, then was life worth living? . . .

"Oh, I don't know," said he, finally. And, beaten in thought, he turned about on his tracks.

The division between them widened, as Doyly's excitement about the holidays increased with the approach of the last week. Why worry? He wouldn't worry. He would be as happy and indifferent as Doyly was. But when on the eve of the day of departure he walked out on his usual stroll and found himself rehearsing a dramatic farewell-scene for the morning, could he believe then that he was not worrying? Did his warm head and the irregular action of his heart suggest that he was quite happy and indifferent? And his conviction that, though his reason saw the childishness of this rehearsed scene, he would certainly go through with it, lacking the will to turn from it, did that look like anything but a wilful dive into pain?

This was the scene that he was composing for the morrow. At ten o'clock the station flies would come up the drive and all

the boys whose destination was London—Doyly among them—would rush out of the school to clamber aboard; but as Tony would not be accompanying them, because he had charge of a later shift which was going to Brighton, he would keep himself hidden from Doyly's sight so as to force the boy to give one last proof of his affection by coming to seek him out. And the room where he would keep out of sight would be the empty New Room, from which he could watch the cabs and the crowd on the drive; here, to anyone who took the least trouble, he could easily be found; and, on the other hand, if Doyly showed no signs whatever of remembering him, he could watch the cabs disappear and suffer the completest torture. Lunacy, all of it; as his mind could easily see. But he was wretched, and in its power.

And, sure enough, next morning he was standing in the New Room, well back, so that he could see the people on the drive and not be seen by them. The open hackney cabs were there, and many of the boys had taken their places, and Doyly was standing on the threshold of Stratton Lye, jesting with a friend who had mounted a box-seat. Ah—quick, sick distress!—he had left the threshold and was walking along the gravel of the drive: was he going to jump into one of them without a thought for Tony? Now he was talking to Winter—talking with a glee that was without flaw—good God! had the boy no feeling at all? Winter was saying good-bye to him; Doyly was looking up with real gratitude into Winter's face and pressing his hand—pressing it hard, as Tony could see, and that pressure was a constriction at his heart. But *now* . . . yes! Doyly was running back into the school! He was coming, then; of course he was coming! One might have known he would. This was all Tony wanted now—that Frank should seek him out and perhaps say something that it would be happiness to remember. . . . Doyly's feet were outside the New Room door—but they passed—they passed into the South Room where was his locker. Tony walked furtively to a corner from which he could command a view across the passage into the sunny South Room. Doyly was at his locker—*gosh!* had he only come back for something he had left? The locker lid slammed down—Tony stepped back out of sight—his heart pounded, as Doyly emerged from the South Room and went quickly, unhesitatingly, down the hall to the cabs outside.

Hurriedly Tony returned to his window, still standing far

back like a spy. Was it believable? Doyly was climbing into a cab, and he was not coming; he had forgotten everything in that merry moment. . . . Tony stared . . . and continued to stare. . . .

The first cab was moving, and the boys roared their cheers, as they always did. The second cab moved too, and the third, and the fourth, in which sat Doyly. Ah, he would at least look round, before the cab turned the bend in the drive and was hidden in the tunnel under the trees—he would look round and remember at the last second. If he would only do that much now, Tony would be satisfied. . . .

The string of cabs went on, and the fourth cab took the curve and passed out of sight.

Tony stared a few minutes longer at the empty drive, and then swung round and began to whistle merrily.

CHAPTER VI

PEGGY RECEDES

THERE is no wheel that swings round the circle of the year so quickly as the three-spoke wheel of a school's three terms. Tony soon discovered this. If the gay Summer term went quickly, the summer holiday went quicker still : and here they were, before the bathing dresses were wholly dry, in a term they called the Christmas term, with the thought of holly already in the air. And round came the spoke of Christmas, bringing the Lent term after it, and the groundsman was at work on the cricket pitch, because the Summer term was lifting again. Was it really true that he was speeding towards the end of his second year at Stratton Lye ? Yes, it was true enough. Well ! he who would fly over time with the smooth, swift flight of a bird, let him seat himself in the scholastic chair.

And to see the year swing round like this, a man must sit in the country. Tony, who had lived all his previous life in London, now learned a new interest, to which he gave the whole of his enthusiasm, and a naïve applause. Wasn't it simply wonderful to be able to watch the changing beauties which the months hung on the countryside ? September, and already the frost was busy, and the cobweb lace was strung with pearls, and the lawns every morning were washed over with a watery milk. October, and the leaves took the sky like birds, crossing the warp of the rain ; or if the day were sunny as summer, the wind shook the tracery of yellow leaves on the branches, till they dazzled the eye like sequins. Full winter, and the naked trees were dark in the hollows, and pools of sky-light lay in the water-logged meadows. Spring, and the young larches filled these woodlands with the youngest green in the world, and the wild cherry put out its blossom of fawny white.

And so it came to Eastertide, and he was home again. And one evening, when the air outside, even in that new-built

Chiswick avenue, was aglow with the young Easter sun, and festooned and spangled with the song of birds, and he and Joyce were face to face over a game of chess, the girl upright and bored, for she was being beaten, and himself bent and engrossed, for, as far as he could see, he was only six moves from the mate, Keatings entered and delivered himself of a most valuable opening sentence. He said: "Gather round, children, gather round. Here be news." His voice was lifted no higher than usual; if anything it was quieter; but Joyce, who stared at him, and Tony, who looked up, saw that he was acting the quiet, phlegmatic, well-bred man whom no news, however astonishing, could explode into excitement.

"Oh, what is it, what is it, Kay?" Joyce exclaimed, who had never any objection to exploding.

"Is one of the Gabriels dead?" asked Tony.

"No. I don't know that it is as good news as that." Keatings drew a chair and sat down, grimly smiling.

"Oh, what is it then—you fool?" persisted Joyce. "Derek's in gaol. He's been caught in some nefarious traffic at last."

"Derek does nothing more nefarious than sell motor cars. I should have thought that was proved to all our satisfactions."

"Yes, I'm afraid that's so," sighed Joyce to Tony. "He says motor cars are the thing of the future. He says everything'll be driven by motors soon, and if ever a war comes, his fortune's made."

"He always was a fool," explained Keatings.

"Oh, but I believe the motor car business is only a blind," decided Joyce, determined to be happy. "I believe they're a gang. You can't make as much money as *he* does by selling cars, can you, Kay?"

"Oh, yes, you can—if you've got enough bounce and a gift for plausible language, and a natural tendency to lie."

"But I've got all those gifts," Joyce demurred. "And I don't make so much money."

"Check!" called Tony.

"Oh, damn *check!*" grumbled Joyce. "He's always checking me. I resign. You've won. I want to hear Keatings's news. What is it, Kay?"

"It's rather magnificent. Thinking it over, I've decided that it's rather magnificent. I was coming home in the train this afternoon and at Earl's Court I looked out of the window and saw two people get into a first-class carriage—a tall man and a girl——"

"How thrilling!" interrupted Joyce. "'A tall man and a girl!' Now if it had been a little man and a tall girl, it'd have been dull."

"Or if it had only been a third-class carriage," suggested Tony.

"And when I add that the man was a parson," continued Keatings.

"Ah!" breathed Joyce, appreciatively.

"... and that the girl was extraordinarily like Peggy, it becomes really succulent. Not in any spirit of curiosity, but simply because my limbs were stiff, I got out and walked up the platform. As I passed the first-class compartment I looked in. There was no one in it except the parson and the girl, and the girl's head lay on the man's shoulder, and I fancy (I'm not sure, mind you, because I was so abashed that I walked on quickly), but I *fancy* his arm was round her waist. The girl was Peggy."

"Kay! The little slut! It wasn't—it couldn't have been Father Michael?"

"It certainly was: as you shall see."

"And is he *in love* with her? Coo! what fools we've been. I thought he was just her spiritual director."

"He was very much in love with her in the train. I stretched my legs again at Hammersmith, and well, it might have been a soldier and a nursemaid, on a seat in Kensington Gardens."

"But, Kay! isn't he supposed to be a celibate? She was at great pains to tell us that. They all are, at that church."

"He may be a celibate, or he may not, but he's engaged to Peggy."

"Engaged! Oh, and I had serious thoughts of being the one myself, who should lure him from his vows."

"Is Peggy *engaged*?" demanded Tony, feeling a mild blow in the thought.

"Yes; hear me out. We all dismounted at Chiswick Station, and I tried to hide myself behind the fat porter, but Peggy was looking up and down the platform, obviously in the hope of seeing me, and she ran up with the news. She was all red and trembling—you know what she can do in that line—and we all shook hands and felt fools, and then walked back together, the Father talking genially all the way, and Peggy speechless, and myself (I confess) somewhat hung up for conversation. But the Father rambled on in a fine, hearty, bedside manner; and now—and now he and she are upstairs telling Mother."

Joyce and Tony just stared, while Keatings took his case of

cigarettes, tossed one to his brother, lit another for himself, threw the match into the grate, and tossed the box to Tony.

"But he must be over forty," Joyce objected suddenly.

"What does that matter? Wouldn't that suit Peggy's ideas down to the ground? . . . And, Joyce, my dear, do you realize that he's a baronet's son?"

"Is he? *Coo!* . . ."

"And what's better still, he's the eldest son; and I don't suppose his old father'll live long—at least we can hope not—the silly old gaffer!"

"I devoutly hope not," Joyce endorsed.

"And child! the Gabriels!" Phlegm deserted the well-bred Keatings, and delight surged into his eyes. "Gorlummy! it's a fair knock-out!"

"I suppose it is."

"Course it is! Elsa and Theresa are both older than you and Peggy, and has a single follower come dangling round them? Devil a one. Nor will one. In three years' time they'll have turned to Suffragetting. But Peggy by then ought to be Lady Saffery—with any luck."

"*Coo!* I *am* glad," said Joyce. "But I wonder how she does it. It's her dog's eyes, I think."

The door opened; and Derek entered: perfectly dressed; his hair groomed down, his morning coat well-cut, the opening of his waistcoat outlined by a white slip, his trousers grey-striped and neatly creased, and his boots strapped in their grey spats, like a couple of valuable whippets in their jackets, when the east wind blows.

"Lord!" exclaimed Keatings. "Here's the Manager of the Lingerie Department."

"I suppose you've heard the news, Derek," said Joyce.

"What news?"

"Peggy's engaged to a wealthy baronet."

Derek, lacking the humorous imagination of Keatings, saw no necessity to act the well-bred man whose calm nothing could ruffle. His eyebrows lifted, and he stared at Joyce, and turned to Keatings for confirmation. But inasmuch as he *was* phlegmatic, he released no louder outburst than, "Goodness! is that so? Or are you being funny?"

He sat down and crossed one leg over the other, first dusting its knee and calf. Always Derek arranged his well-clad legs as if he were handling two perfect art-pieces.

"She's going to marry that Father Michael of hers."

"*Him?* But he isn't a baronet." One felt that Derek was relieved. Secretly delighted at being the most successful one of the family, he had no desire to be suddenly dethroned by his younger sister.

"He's a baronet's son," Keatings exclaimed readily.

"I didn't know that," said Derek.

"No, there are a lot of things you don't know—strange as it may seem."

Derek ignored this, as he always ignored Keatings's snubs; could he not afford to, while he was the inventive and successful man of business and Keatings remained in the dull rut of an Insurance Office?

"But he can't marry her. He's a celibate."

"That's what's so magnificent," Tony submitted. "To marry a baronet's one thing; but to marry a celibate baronet's very much finer."

"But *he*—he, a High Church parson, who probably believes that yielding to feminine charms is yielding to sin! Why, he won't know what to do with her when he gets her."

"He seemed to know what to do all right in the train," Keatings suggested. "I couldn't have done it better myself."

"Why? What happened in the train?"

Keatings repeated his story with gross exaggerations. And Derek, after hearing, paused before commenting: "Fancy anyone wanting to do that with Peggy!"

"I suppose she's attractive enough to *others*!" Joyce proffered.

"I can never see much in her, myself," said Derek. "And why did she want to be so secretive about it? How long do you suppose they've been cuddling without our knowledge? She's been attending that church for two years. Has it been going on all the time?"

"No," Joyce suddenly pronounced. "I see it all. He proposed to-day and cuddled for the first time in the train. He waited till after Easter: he would naturally wait till Lent is over. Lent is a time of abstinence."

"I think Joyce is about right," Keatings approved.

"When will they marry?"

"They'll marry——" Joyce, now considering herself a kind of meteorological expert, cast her eyes up to the ceiling, as if

it were a sheet on which she could work out her arithmetic. "They'll marry in about a year. It's now Easter; they'll hardly marry in the winter; so it'll be just before Lent. Before Lent, for the above-mentioned reasons. That means I ought to be a godmother by Christmas. Oh, do you think it'll be born on Christmas Day? I hope it is, the darling! We'll call it Noel—Noel Saffery."

"What's its father's Christian name?" asked Derek.

"Michael, you ass! Doesn't everyone call him Father Michael?"

"You think you're clever," sneered Derek, "but it doesn't follow that it's his Christian name at all. These High Church priests often call themselves after angels."

"Well, anyhow, it *is* his name," Keatings clinched. "So we've a Michael to match their Gabriel now."

"Ass!" laughed Joyce.

"And as he's to be our brother, we shall have to call him Mike. Or Micky. It won't come easy to me——"

He stopped for the door handle was turning. Peggy and Father Michael entered; and all the family pushed back their chairs and stood up, as if a headmaster had come into the room. Tony noticed that the blood-red flags of shame flying in Peggy's cheeks and down her throat had almost disfigured it.

"Here are some of them," she began. "No, they're all here. That's lucky."

"I have to be presented," explained Father Michael, behind an embracing smile. "There's Keith. Well, I know *you* already. Won't you introduce me to the others?"

Keatings pulled Joyce forward by the arm.

"This is Joyce."

Father Michael took her hand, held it a little while, and then drew her to him, and kissed her cheek. "What a beautiful sister!" he said. Joyce blushed richly, and her eyes sparkled. The three brothers felt foolish: Derek looked at his finger-nails which were in excellent condition, Tony made a comic grimace to Peggy, and Keatings hastened to lift the general embarrassment by proceeding:

"And this one's Tony. He's supposed to be the brainy one. But I don't think there's much in it."

Tony extended his hand awkwardly. "How do you do, sir?"

"For mercy's sake don't call me 'sir,'" protested Father Michael, shaking his hand.

"And this is Derek. He's the only one of us who makes large money."

"How do you do?" said Derek, with perfect ease.

Then Keatings, feeling very uncomfortable, essayed facetiousness. "That's the lot—with Peggy. Not much of a lot, all told," which sounded to him so absurd that he in his turn ran up the flag that was in Peggy's cheeks.

Since all were standing, and none, least of all Joyce, who was feeling about thirteen years old, liked to be the first to sit down, it fell to Father Michael to cut the tension by suggesting: "Let's all sit down."

At once they all sat down, exactly as if they had been his congregation and he had said: "Let us now read God's Word for a space."

Father Michael, putting his hand in Peggy's arm, guided her to the sofa, where he sat at her side and took her hand on to his lap that he might stroke it. Keatings looked anywhere but at this process; Derek dropped his eyes to his boots and adjusted his spats and gave his subsequent interest to the window; Tony thrust his hands deep into his trouser pockets, and with compressed lips and vibrating mouth, kept a giggle safely out of sight; and Joyce saw his predicament, and immediately turned red and rigid with the same effort.

A perfunctory talk ensued, in which, after the first five minutes Derek played by far the most distinguished part, taking up the Father's points and endorsing or disallowing them with the assurance of a contemporary. Keatings was conscientious, laborious, but unhelpful; Joyce ventured one or two insertions, of which, to judge by her blushes, she was completely ashamed, and some of them she failed to finish properly, because of her impeding giggle; and Peggy and Tony remained throughout in their safe but unhonourable tents of silence. The ordeal was closed by Father Michael: he rose and offered his most smiling farewells; and Peggy at once rose after him. All stood as he opened the door for her and followed her out, laying his hand upon her shoulder.

No one spoke. Keatings wiped his forehead. Derek grimaced. And Tony flung himself back on his chair, and released the turbulent giggle, which came out in the shape of an uproarious laugh.

"You did look a row of imbeciles," he said at last.

Keatings sighed. "It was bright and brotherly—what?"

And Joyce declared: "Oh, I *think* he's rather sweet; I *think* he's rather a lamb. . . . Yes, I'm delighted with my new brother. He's better than any I've had so far."

And Derek was beginning: "I think Peggy might have done worse. He seems a gentleman——" when Peggy reappeared at the door.

"Keatings," said she, keeping hold of its handle.

"Yes, child?"

"Keatings, you've been communicating with Daddy recently, haven't you?"

"Yes."

"Well, don't write to him about this, till I've had a chance to. I'm going to write this evening. I want him to hear of my engagement from me myself, and within an hour or two of its happening. Don't you think he ought to? Poor, darling Father—he'll be out of all the fun. And he would have enjoyed it so. Promise you won't?"

"Of course I won't."

"Oh, thanks. Well, good-bye. Michael's waiting."

And she was gone again. But her visit had moved Derek to the decision that he also must be going, and to a very heavy comment. Lighting a cigarette and strolling towards the door, he said: "Peggy's having no father available means that one of us'll have to discuss the marriage settlements. We'll have to look into the position much more thoroughly than ever Mother'll do. I think this man takes it for granted, rather coolly, that we're going to give our sister to him, don't you? Still, all that'll wait."

He disappeared, and Keatings stared after him.

"God! what a fool!" he exclaimed.

Peggy was a winter bride, married in December, when the appointment of Father Michael to an incumbency in Southend had opened a vicarage to their feet. At the word "Southend" Joyce had wrinkled her nose, but Peggy had exclaimed: "It's lovely; it's all cockles and costers and East End trippers. Next to Whitechapel or Bethnal Green, there's no place I'd like better. Michael and I'll convert them all." A leaden sky

overhung the wedding, and the promise of snow ; and Tony had a fancy that, against the still, opaque, charged background of the embracing sky, the tall bridegroom in his black clothes, and Peggy herself, had a preternatural clearness. His own thoughts also, when Peggy had been driven away, and he was returning alone to his station, seemed to have become preternaturally clear.

And as he sat in his train, shut from the view of the country by the darkness of the December evening, and discouraged from reading by the swooning gaslight in his compartment, he saw only the clear figure of Peggy (now Peggy Saffery) in her going-away dress, and the clear figure of the tall man who had taken her away. And he thought. He thought how unreal, in spite of his solidity, was this Michael Saffery, who had come and gone—a name, a visible face and figure, a chain of pleasant greeting and banter ; no more. The real Michael Saffery he had never seen. . . . Peggy had seen him, perhaps. . . . Or did anyone ever see a real man ? . . . All Michael's kindness and banter were really only a standardized garment that revealed nothing more specific, nothing more proper to the man himself, than did his standardized, priestly attire. To Tony this man, though Peggy, his sister, weighted and helpless with love, had dived into the depths of him to find her life, was no more than a tall, spare parson, with an ascetic but genial face, and a visiting manner.

Could one ever know the real truth of anybody ? Of his most intimate friends did Tony know only just a little more than he knew of these two passengers who chanced to have jostled into this train with him ? One was a lined, pondering, weary old virgin of fifty, with her reticule containing no doubt a sovereign or two, and a florin or two, to support her in her meaningless course ; and the other was a palpable " commercial gent," with a bag of dull business on the rack above him, and a desire, always strong in commercial gents, to break the tedium of a journey by opening a conversation. The window provided him with a card to lead.

" A damned dark night," he said.

" Yes, it is," Tony agreed.

" You gotta go far ? "

" I get out at Hassocks."

" Yes ; a slow train, this ; stops everywhere, doesn't it ? I get out at East Croydon, thank goodness—trains are too parky

on a night like this. I been up to Stockport to do a bit of business and brought it off, too ! ”

“ Big, was it ? ”

“ Not too bad ; not too bad.” The man sucked his teeth. “ I ought to clear my twenty out of it.”

“ I’m so glad.”

“ Yes. . . . You come from far ? ”

Tony explained that he had come from marrying his sister ; and the man said : “ Really ? Go on ! ” and talked about married life, and how it was the thing, really, with all its ups and downs, and how—this in a knowing whisper, for the old virgin’s sake—a man didn’t make himself a man till he’d filled a man’s part, and how he expected Tony’d be finding the right girl for himself soon, and sincerely wished him joy of her—and the train slowed into East Croydon. He fetched down his bag of dull business. “ Well, good night to you.”

“ Good night.”

“ Yes. Pleased to have met you. Hope you have a good journey and the snow keeps up, till you’re safely home. Good night, again.”

“ Good night.”

He faded into the darkness.

Could one ever know anything real of anybody ? Peggy. His knowledge of her differed only in degree from his knowledge of these strangers huddled in the same box with him for an hour. He had met her a few more times than once ; he had seen into her just a little further than her outer garments ; but not very far. Nor she into him. And now she had gone out of his life almost as completely as this good fellow who had left the train.

There had been no essential change ; all that had happened was that Peggy had gone a little further outside his life than she had always been. Every living soul, even the one nearest to us, was outside our lives. The vast wilderness of our inner lives was untrodden by any foot save our own ; its fringes alone were visited. And we were all silent ; only our fringes speaking. He thought of Wavers, that little figure of long ago, who had first stirred in him the yearning for another person ; of old Raking, with whom he had imagined a perfect friendship ; of Sibyl Chandry with her dark hair, her oval face, and the unspoken love in her eyes ; of Frank Doyly, so recently gone, and yet nearly forgotten now ; of his father, his mother, and

Keatings and Joyce and Derek and Peggy. And he thought of the girl he would marry. They would only be dear strangers, he and she. He shivered in his seat. He was fronting the truth of the utter solitariness of every man; and it is a truth whose face is so intolerable to look into that we may praise God that the stress and laughter of life but seldom part their curtains to disclose it to us.

What was the meaning of it all? Sixty or seventy years of complete loneliness, with never a hope of that perfect mutual absorption with another soul, which was the only satisfying thing in the world. One's body was forever prompting one to it, and yet, to a moment's clear thought, it was seen to be as unattainable in this world as the shimmering water of a mirage in the wilderness. Would it be attained hereafter in some less limited order? The fact of sex hinted that it was the goal of man—to pour himself into some other person, to press his whole body thitherward, as if he would melt into her, to yield her all that he could of his very life. (Almost for the first time Tony's body stirred at the thought of the girl who would take from him all of himself that he was able to give. When was she coming?) And yet this blending only left one frustrated again, and issued—how strange!—in another being who was destined to the same loneliness and frustration.

And supposing that in some spiritual world this perfect unity were attained, would it be with only one person? Why, he could imagine a love—he could even feel the seeds of it in himself—which could never be content unless it had achieved its perfect unity with every living soul—which could not bear that one soul should be outside its embrace. Would this, the only perfect fulfilment, ever be granted one; or would death close the mockery with annihilation?

No, no; not annihilation. This love, this dim craving, was itself a strong hint that annihilation could not be. A thing like this must have meaning; and what meaning had it, if it just lifted its head in the world, met its frustration, and perished for ever? No, nothing could be so meaningless as that. "I believe then—but in what?"

His thoughts swung to a testing and distillation of his religion. What did he honestly believe? Like most sons of an English vicarage and an English public school, he had accepted and discharged the performances of religion with a shrugging resignation that shirked thought. Once, during the month

that followed his confirmation he had secretly lived the religious life, and very happy—nay, more than happy, blessed—those few weeks seemed to him now. But the light had dulled and died, and thereafter the services in church had become again a mere concession to propriety, as void of interest and emotion as the *Preces* gabbled by six hundred boys at five o'clock in the Great Hall at St. Paul's. "No, I cannot honestly say that I believe in any of those dogmas and practices. Not at present. But I have faith in something—I have just said so I don't—I can't believe any of the details of Christianity, but I have faith in a Purpose. There must be purpose in everything; if I were to deny that, I should do violence to the laws of my thought."

But how vague! "Faith in a Purpose:" there was nothing there to give him again that inner serenity and blessedness which, for a few weeks, he had experienced. And he would like it again; oh, how he would like it again! All men would. Let them ridicule religion as they liked, let them fly the title "saint" as it were a title of shame, yet all who had once known what "peace in believing" meant, all who had ventured the experiment of hiding their life with Christ in God, would rather discover that quiet garden again than the richest pleasure-grounds of the world.

Redhill Station.

The lined and weary lady fumbled with the door, and he leapt up and opened it for her, and handed out her heavy suitcase, and smiled deprecatingly, when she said: "Oh, thank you. Thank you so much. Good evening."

"Good evening;" then he slammed the door on himself to keep out the cold.

If only he could believe it all! If only he had the simple belief which it was to be presumed was Peggy's, why then—suddenly he saw it—his course would be clear. Highly sensitized this evening to the loneliness of all living people, he saw that nothing mattered except to love as many of them as possible, to serve them, to bring them peace, to draw them closer and closer to him, and to one another, with bands of love, and to do this work while it was yet day, for the night came apace; and all this painted one picture—the portrait of a priest. All those who in Christ's name had loved the whole world and laboured for it were making a winning appeal to Tony to-night, as he sat in his railway carriage—St. Francis of Assisi, St. Aidan of Iona, the

blessed Curé d'Ars, Father Damien, Tolstoy, Father Ignatius, even old Captain Alum—and a few, a tiny few, of the clergy he had known in his father's days.

Three Bridges Station; and an old gentleman whose kind eyes, grey moustache, and Shakespeare collar gave him the appearance of a chapel elder, padded into the carriage softly and patiently—as softly and patiently as he spoke, rubbing together his hands cased in white woollen gloves :

“ A cold night.”

“ It is rather.”

“ Ah well, it is not far to Brighton now.”

“ I get out at Hassocks.”

“ Some lovely country that way ; but I'm going on to the sea.”

“ Yes ? ”

And the train, moving, lulled them both into their thoughts.

Ah, if only he could believe ! That was all he wanted. Then, have done with this hunger for a single love ! He would join some community like the Mirfield Fathers and seek, not to get the adoration of a single person, but to give himself and all that he was worth to the whole world. He pictured himself in a cassock, visiting the sick and the sinful, a basket on his arm.

Or the picture changed : and he was very like Tolstoy—a tough old man with a long beard, who, after proclaiming his creed of communism, universal love, and non-resistance to evil, had sold all his possessions and given them to the poor, and was now labouring in a smock-frock by the side of the peasants he loved.

But such a life could not be lived—he saw this—without an intense inner life of prayer—and one could not pray without belief. “ And I don't believe. I can't. . . . And I have a fancy that I never shall—not in that way—not with the conviction that would give me the spiritual and intellectual ease for such work. . . . ”

What to do then ? His present schoolmastering would lead to nothing ; it was a temporary drift that he must soon arrest, if he were to make a position and reputation and money. (Making money ! Like a broken-winged bird he had dropped instantly from the skies to the earth.) Would it not be best to make a move soon ? In a few months he would be twenty-one. But what move ? Pretty obscure, not to say gloomy, his prospects. Then, of a sudden, he remembered his poetry.

Could he not consecrate himself to his art, as a monk consecrated himself to religion? (He began to wing aloft again.) His poetry could even be conceived of as a priestly task, since it was both interpretation and ministration. Yes, yes; if he were to consecrate himself thus, there would be no better bread-winning occupation than his present mastership, with its quiet healthy days, its freedom from strain and care, and its long holidays. Derek would certainly despise him; and no girl would be able to marry him on his low stipend—but what of all this? After all these things did the Gentiles seek. He would, if necessary, despise money and position and—most difficult of all—family praise. The future! Let the future care for itself. He would not make the timid creature's bid for security. Worldly security was a dull business, like the dull business in the bag of the commercial gentleman; it was valued only by your commonplace souls—by your Dereks. Rather he would make a kind of monastic vow of poverty and celibacy and go forward as a servant and friend, whether recognized or unrecognized, of this world of solitaires. It was a pleasing idea, and he felt happier now—happy with a resolve rooted and already stirring—as the train bore into Hassocks station and delivered him for his humble tasks at Stratton Lye.

“Good night, sir,” he said to the old gentleman in white woollen gloves.

“Oh . . . good night, good night.”

CHAPTER VII

WHEN TOLSTOY RETREATED

AND so Tony, happy with his poverty and his celibacy, made a long halt at Stratton Lye. He could hardly believe, when the time came for a violent change, that he had delayed there five quiet years. Years wholly pleasant they were ; years of successful teaching, praised by Mr. Sugden, for with the departure of Browning and Cyril Winter, he had assumed their seniority and, on taking over the higher forms, had helped to bring a whole procession of scholarships to the doors of Stratton Lye ; years of engrossing creation, for he would give his spare evenings to his verse-craft, and there was no happiness quite like this, and of the lyrics which he had cut and polished, two or three—though he had sent twenty or thirty to the editors—had been accepted for tail-pieces in the magazines, and paid for with half guineas.

His acceptance of poverty and celibacy was stable enough, probably because at present he did not want anything more ; but his indifference to reputation and family praise was very insecure. The days of his lyrics' publication, as they drew near, had been days under a searchlight's beam ; the nights that introduced them had been restless with excitement ; and with the morning the shutters were scarcely down from the news-agent's shop before he was inside purchasing copies of the magazine for his mother, for Peggy, for Derek, who was abroad, and for friends. Many letters to else forgotten friends did he write on these days, beginning : " How are you, old man ? " and ending : " There's a little effusion of mine in this month's *Windsor*."

That year should succeed year in this noiseless tread, without crowning his brows with fame, did not seriously disturb him as yet : between eighteen and twenty-three all life seemed to stretch before him.

In the summer of 1910 two things of moment happened ; and they were brought about by a letter from Frank Doyly, the first for two years. All Frank's old high spirits were in the letter, and not a small dose of his old affection ; he was writing most clearly under the bright light and the impulse of a plan that rejoiced him. There was a confounded conspiracy, said he, among his masters and parents to make him read Euripides, Horace, Catullus, and other old bounders, during the summer holidays. He had put up a fine defence, inflicting no small losses on the enemy—mainly losses of patience and good manners and (he hoped) self-respect—but he was now surrendering on his own terms, which were that he was to choose his own tutor. That tutor was a certain Mr. O'Grogan who was the world's best classical master. And now it seemed that his father, breathless and weary from the fights, was going to communicate with this master and beg him to accompany the family on an August holiday in Belgium and give to the distinguished prisoner of war some two hours' sweat a day. " Please do," concluded Doyly, shedding suddenly the grand metaphorical manner and standing in his naked boyishness, " oh please, *please* do. It'll be hell if you don't."

Mr. Doyly's letter came two days later, inviting him to the task with much courtesy and suggesting " as a possible inducement " the discharge of all his expenses and an honorarium of four guineas a week. And Tony who felt more ashamed to take four guineas a week than anxious to haggle for more, replied that he was perfectly satisfied with Mr. Doyly's most generous offer and would do all he could to be worthy of their confidence.

Anticipation of this holiday was now the dominant pleasure in his mind. Something of his old love for Frank returned, but very different in character from the aching obsession of three years before ; it had quieted into a gratified attachment, which, moreover, showed an odd tendency to spread over the whole of this unseen family. What was Doyly at seventeen going to be like ? What were his parents and his two elder sisters like ? Odd that a family could be a lovable unit like an individual ! Perhaps one of the sisters. . . .

It was with a restless keenness that one August afternoon he stood on the platform of Ashford Junction, waiting for the London-Dover train to roll in, and bring the Doyly family to its meeting with him. More and more impatient he became as

the minutes passed ; nervousness began to trouble his breathing. Absurd, but when the breast of the engine roared towards him and its breath smote his cheek, the nervousness tugged at his heart like a man's hand. The curving of the train brought into view a youth's head and shoulders far extended from a carriage window, and his hand outrageously waving ; and before the train was still, or Tony had recovered from its strepitous onrush, the youth, perhaps one inch under six feet and with an athlete's waist and a blacksmith's shoulders, was walking with a grin towards him.

"Hallo, sir."

Tony put forth a hand and an answering smile. But heavens ! was this young Hermes the fawning Doyly of three years back ? A flush accompanied the smile on Tony's face ; he shook Frank's hand and curtailed his thoughts with laughter, for he was feeling uncomfortable at the memory of certain passages between them, and a little repelled to think he had experienced a lover's hunger for the touch of this boy's hand and shoulder.

"You haven't changed a bit," said Doyly.

"And you aren't recognizable," laughed Tony, for he had nothing to say. And again he studied Doyly's face and figure. One had no original thought as one looked at him, on Ashford platform ; one just remembered Praxiteles and Greece.

For a mile along the Dover railroad, the Doylys' reserved compartment was a drawing-room in which Tony, standing with the help of the luggage rack, was being presented to a grey mother in one corner seat, a grey father in another, and two sisters, one surprisingly old and matronly, and the other very pleasant but far from beautiful. "She isn't here," thought Tony.

Ostend was the family's base during their holiday, and here, if the sun shone, they consigned Frank's lessons to the nights, and spent the days either on the sands and in the sea, or visiting Ghent, or Dixmude, or Ypres. At the last place they heard so much talk in the *pâtisserie* about the interest and beauty of Furnes that Frank was vehement for proceeding there the very next day. But this was their third week, and the family shook its head. By now they had tired of this cathedral visiting and picture staring, and this joggling in a carriage over cobbled roads ; and Mr. Doyly drew a "Hear, hear" from his wife and daughters, when he boldly pronounced that if you had seen one of these old Flemish communes you had seen them all.

"You're a lazy lot," complained Frank. "Dull and heavy—that's what you are. No spirit of exploration. I want to see something new every day. I'm going to Furnes; it's part of my education. And so is Mr. O'Grogan. In fact we are going to-morrow. We'll walk to Nieuport, if the weather's obliging, and take the train then to Furnes."

"I'm ready," Tony assured him.

"Of course," agreed Frank. And his voice hinted that the family ought to feel the contrast between Mr. O'Grogan's vigour and their lassitude.

The weather was more than obliging the next morning; it beamed a brilliant benediction over them; and, indeed, its warm enthusiasm became almost embarrassing, so that Frank and Tony had pushed their jackets into their ruck-sacks, when they issued out of Ostend on to the long straight road to Nieuport. Under the sun it lay like a taut tape between the sand-dunes and the sea.

Given a flat road through country monotonously the same—sand-dunes and coarse grass nearby, and Dutch elms and church spires along one horizon, and the sea sparkling on the other—let its course be so straight that it is empty of surprises and doubts—let these be the conditions of the road, and two people, walking it, will swing into their rapidest stride, and, over the unhesitating rhythm of their motion, will release a talk so high and absorbing as to be counted among the memorable things of life.

The talk of Tony O'Grogan and Frank Doyle this morning was all about the certainty of an early war with Germany. It was the year 1910, when the war-scare fashion was at the crest of one of its waves. And though Tony, as a young intellectual, was more than half a Tolstoyan with a loud hatred of militarism, yet there was a stirring in his young blood at this distant call of war, and this growing appetite had dictated a conqueror's terms to his theories, instructing him to expound the view "that they would have to fight *this* war—they would have to teach Germany, as the arch enemy of pacifism, that pacifists were prepared to take up arms in one last battle for their faith." Mr. Robert Blatchford, the Socialist editor who had proclaimed exactly this message, had been of great help to Tony in this satisfactory compromise.

Was there no chance of the war's being avoided, inquired Frank.

"Absolutely imposs.," declared Tony. "No, it's absolutely imposs., I'm afraid. The Germans are perfectly frank about it. Last summer holidays Mr. Sugden had the bright idea of making a little more money by having some foreign students as parlour boarders, and he asked me to stay with him during August to talk English to them. There were six Germans, one Frenchman, and myself; and we talked of little else except the war. One day I had taken them for a walk along the downs from Ditchling Beacon to the top of Wolstonbury, and two of them, two shaven-headed coves called Strauss and Wedekind, as we stood and looked over the weald, laughed and said, 'Next time we come over this brow it will be from the sea, and with half a million men deployed along the skyline.' And I said, '*Will* you? You won't get over the top of the brow, because we shall be waiting for you, and all along the line of the downs, ten million strong.' And he said, '*Nein, nein*, you've got no army,' to which I replied, 'No, but most of us can fire a gun, and I shall have much pleasure in shooting Strauss first and then hitting Wedekind over the head with the butt end.' We had a most jolly talk about it. Did you read Robert Blatchford's articles in the *Daily Mail*?"

"No," Frank admitted. "But I heard about them——"

"Well," Tony broke in, unheedingly, "*he* said that it was inevitable, and the sooner we trained every able-bodied man in the kingdom, the better. That from a Socialist, mind you. He sees what the triumph of Germany would mean——"

"That's what Lord Roberts is always saying, isn't it——?"

"Yes. Yes, of course," Tony admitted, but as if doubtful of this new ally. "But he says it from a different point of view. He's frankly a militarist. But whether you look at it as a pacifist and an internationalist—which is what I think I am—or as a howling patriot—as *you* probably are—I should have thought it perfectly obvious what was afoot. Teddy saw it all along—Teddy being our late lamented sovereign, Edward VII—what do you suppose his *entente cordiale* with France was about, and this alliance with Russia, and our overtures to Japan? The foreign offices are getting shoulder to shoulder, but the people won't see it—the English people being, bar none, the most mentally indolent on the face of the globe——"

"Damn, no!" Frank burst in.

"Yes, but—interrupting you for a moment—they simply

won't see it ; they don't want to believe anything so disturbing, so they shut down their imaginations and walk straight on, whistling and refusing to see a cloud that's black with the thunder-storm."

"Oh, will it come soon, do you think? How ripping!"

"Those German students seemed to think so. Wedekind said that next year was the appointed hour. Nineteen-eleven, he said——"

"Oh, I hope it's not quite so soon as that," Frank interrupted, a little skip of excitement intruding itself into his stride. "I shall be only eighteen then, and I suppose that's too young to get a commission in the army."

"You needn't worry about that. I've no doubt we shall want every man from eighteen years old and upwards. Robert Blatchford says so."

So went the thrilling talk, and the miles were swung beneath their stride: the sand dunes went past their left shoulders, unconsidered, and the glistening Channel accompanied them on their right. Scarcely did they see the sparse houses of Westende and Lombartzyde as they strode through them, their speed quickened with talk and their inward eyes engaged on a picture of war. From the sand dunes came no word of prophecy; they did not whisper that among them would run the long entanglements of barbed wire, and the chain of concrete *mebuses* with their machine guns pointed seaward in expectation of the invading English, and their searchlights commanding the Channel; they could not murmur, "You are marching into No-Man's-Land."

Nieuport was in front of Frank and Tony now, its red roofs, its crow-step gables, its flèches and bell-turrets rising behind the masts and the ruddy sails on the Yser river. Frank and Tony had just spoken their pleasure in the red sails, when a loud, palpitating hum, low in the sky behind them, turned both their heads as one. A huge clumsy biplane was flying towards Nieuport, not three hundred feet above the ground.

"Great Snakes!" shouted Frank. "It's an aeroplane. The first I've seen!"

"Yes, it's from Ostend," Tony explained. "I heard there was one coming to give a demonstration on the sands."

They stood still and stared with parted lips at the machine roaring overhead. They could see the doll-like head and shoulders of the aviator. Above their watching faces the

aeroplane traced a semicircle as it turned its nose again for Ostend. It flew straight away from them, almost as if their two faces had been the points it had selected for its hairpin bend. So rapt were they by this unfamiliar sight that they said nothing till the machine had diminished to a speck, motionless against the blue, and its roar had faded into a hum that was sounding less in their ears than in their memories. They never thought of it as a visitor out of the future, bringing a murmur of a great noise that the future held in its keeping, and turning about and receding into the future again.

Instead they recommenced their walk, and quickly found the happy, easy stride.

And walking on, they disputed whether in the coming war, aeroplanes could be employed to any good purpose; whether in their comparative clumsiness they wouldn't be shot down like grouse on the wing; whether they would ever be capable of sufficiently sustained flights to bomb the reinforcements marching up to the battle. And talking thus, they crossed the bridge that spanned the Yser; but it held its secret. Left and right of its entrance was a belt of trees and pasture, with here and there a farm building: No-Man's-Land; No-Man's-Land where, four years later, the two battle lines would meet, clash, and finally, since neither would yield it up, entrench themselves for a fifty months' quarrel; where the Véry lights would shoot up at night and outline these trees, now shivered and blasted and thrown; where the searchlights would sweep round and illumine the old piers of the bridge; where thousands of men would take their bullet or their shell-splinter and shut their eyes on this, their last picture of the world they had known.

Frank and Tony passed on into Nieuport, and chose a café on the Yser's bank, for the refreshing of themselves with some *sirop de groseilles*. Frank sat himself down by an iron table on the pavement to guard the long glasses and reserve the chairs, while Tony went in search of a *pâtisserie* and cakes. Five minutes later the cakes were spread upon the table, seated on their paper bags: *suédois*, *meringues*, *bateaux marrons*, *tartlettes au fruits*, *babas* and *éclairs*; sixteen in all; eight each; and they devoured them every one without distress, for their stomachs were like their minds and at an age of enthusiasm and receptivity. And while they digested the cakes and called for more *sirop*, they continued the talk; and so did its stirring images occupy Tony's mind that he took little count of the real

scene before his eyes—the Yser with its red-sailed barges and the flat country stretching behind to the outlines of Westende, now bathed in a haze from the Channel. On the film of his memory came only a vague impression that the café was a corner building, and that if he turned his head, he could look up a long, lifting street and see at its top the tower and roof of *Les Halles*. And that at the end of the embankment was the little station of the *Chemins de Fer Vicinaux*.

"I don't want to mount the train yet," Frank maintained. "We talk better walking. Can't we walk further?"

Tony produced the map and spread it on the table.

"We might walk to Coxyde or Oost-Dunkerque—Oost-Dunkerque sounds promising. It seems we can pick up that road-side train anywhere."

"Well, let's," said Frank; and suiting the action to the word, he stood up and shook his flannel trousers into place. "I love these Belgian villages."

Tony drained his glass and rose too; and together they began the long tramp to Oost-Dunkerque. With so brilliant a subject of conversation it would seem but an easy stretch. And sometimes behind the conversation, Tony, delighting in this new intimacy with Doyly and perceiving that the boy would soon be of an age with him as he was already of a height, wondered if a friendship was beginning between them that would last through the whole of two long lives—such a friendship as he had always dreamed of.

On then with his friend to Oost-Dunkerque, creating his pictures of what they would do in the coming war; but never seeing the strangest picture of all, which, even after it had established itself as the truth, forever seemed too strange for believing; never the picture of himself, Captain O'Grogan marching, at the head of his company—on and on, till he recognized the cobbled road from Coxyde to Nieuport—reaching Nieuport at night and seeing under the autumn stars that it was nothing now but some acres of undulating brick-rubble, a few gutted walls, and the shell of a church standing in a picturesque ruin against the sky—clambering down into his Company Headquarters which were some cellars beneath the rubble—and with the daylight next morning setting out to find the spot where he and his friend had sipped their *sirup*, and prophesied this war—finding it easily, because he had only to go down the remains of the street which dipped from *Les Halles* to the quays—and

standing there and thinking, " Yes, under this mound of rubble that café lies, and there are actually weeds growing over its grave ; that's the old Yser, right enough, though there are no red sails on it now, and its concrete walls have been shelled into the water ; there's all that's left of the little station of the *Chemins de Fer Vicinaux* ; and look ! there's even the rusty ruin of one of its tram-like railway carriages ! Just to think of it ! To think that we should have sat here, discussing this war, on a *trottoir* that would be buried beneath its desolations, and within a stone's throw of the cellar that would be my Company Headquarters, and—O Frank, Frank !—hardly more than a cannon's shot from the place where the better of us should die. . . . And you said, I remember, ' I love these Belgian villages. '

CHAPTER VIII

THÉRÈSE OF OSTEND

AT the end of August the Doylys left for Paris to spend the last fortnight of Frank's holidays merrymaking. Paris had been the noisy demand of Frank ; his sisters had immediately endorsed it, and Mr. Doyly, after protesting that September was no season for the boulevards, had decided abruptly : " Well, it'll be hot, it'll also be cheap ; " whereupon the whole family packed up their baggage. Tony made his farewells on the platform of Ostend station, agreed to a hundred plans for reunions in England gave the train a humorous push to help its slow starting, and waved to Frank and the sisters, who leant in turn from the windows and waved back, till borne out of sight. A sudden sense of loneliness gripped him.

The bank-notes of Mr. Doyly, fattening his pocket, persuaded him to delay during his remaining two weeks in Ostend. He gave the mornings to the sands, first bathing, when he would wilfully swim out far enough to set the *sauveteurs* shouting and blowing their trumpets, and then reclining with his pipe in a hammock chair and watching the gaiety of others. Often his note-book came out of his blazer pocket, that inspirations might be feverishly jotted down, for few things moved him quicker to that wondering pity which is the tilth of creation than the sight of a multitude of people happy, boisterous, and buffooning, under the tonic of the sun.

One thing, perhaps, touched yet more vitally the germinating seeds ; and this was the massed music of the Kursaal orchestra, as it filled every night the high, wide roof of the Grande Rotonde. In that garish and pillared mosque of pleasure, with the portraits of the great composers looking down from their painted medallions on the ceiling, and the flags of all nations drooping from the encircling gallery, and a thousand well-dressed people

seated at their tables, and the tall mirrors on the left reflecting a distorted canvas of the whole scene—here, in an air heavy with the smoke of men's cigars and the scent of women's *Peau d'Espagne*, he would sit alone at his private table, lipping his own cigar, and fixing his eyes on everyone's focal point, to wit, the black back and passionate arms of M. Hellesens, the conductor, who, in his little brass pulpit that jutted from the orchestra's balcony, was poising and plunging and swinging and swaying and brandishing fists before the tempest of music, like King Lear evoking the storm and acclaiming it with a dithyramb.

But Tony's brain only half apprehended M. Hellesens, for in the infinite spaces behind his staring eyes the music had set a whole school of young poets and phrase-makers to their tasks; and M. Hellesens only came back into full possession and scattered the school when his ravening gymnastics and passionate forward-reaching seemed like to rend him in twain or to lift the whole excited audience through the air on to his back—or when a throbbing metronomic excitement began to beat in his shoulders, as the brass and woodwind blared out a warrant for a universal madness among the instruments, and the forty fiddlers entered upon a wild acceleration, all going mad together, and a brain-storm swelled in the drummer till he was a terrifying lunatic abandoned to the percussion of everything within reach, and the music was a thunder and an earthquake and a doomsday, in which it seemed the whole orchestra must perish together, like the wild spirits they were, with M. Hellesens diving after his performers, baton uplifted, into the fellowship of their damnation. And just when Tony felt that his brain must burst, and knew that every other of the thousand listeners was in the like condition, lo! it finished in a last frenzy of the drummer and a crash—and M. Hellesens was still alive, and facing round upon all and bowing, and the fiddlers were quiet and wiping their bows or their foreheads, and the horn-players were spitting down their instruments, and the drummer was a perfectly sane young man—even a bored young man—as he laid his weapons down.

Then, in his excitement, Tony felt as if much of that power which had been released from the balcony had entered into his own being, and he was himself a full-charged store of power, a genius in endowment and a giant in will. And when

the music began again, his confidence mounted to a knowledge that he would create larger and larger poems—larger poems than man had yet produced—superhuman poems; he could hear their periods rising and falling and soaring to majestic climaxes, like the waves of sound; and then his emotion would change, and he would perceive the inability of literature to attain to the dense texture of orchestrated music, or to express so perfectly the wistfulness of life and its wordless longings, and he would deplore that, in his chosen art, he must ever express so much less than he could feel and see. Oh, there was only one thing worth being, and that was a giant among composers; the Beethovens and Wagners of the world were its greatest voices, and he could not be content to rank below the greatest to-night.

Here came a plump soprano to sing to them, and the orchestra were preparing to weave a tapestry of sound behind her; she began; her voice came effortlessly from her lifted face and wound above them, sounding the world's sorrow and making it beautiful; the people listened and stared; and Tony, moved to a new delight, told himself again and again that here, surely, was the divinest thing that had been given to men, a woman's voice to sing to them; here was one of those many things that went so far towards balancing the ills of life. Oh, with what a myriad of such enjoyments the gods had endowed the world! When would grumbling men see it, and stop bleating for their few hours of pain? Just hark to this outburst of enthusiastic applause: wasn't it another wonderful thing? This generosity and gratitude surging up from a thousand people, wasn't it absolutely glorious? Why, they loved the plump soprano in this moment, the good souls! A universal "Bravo!" a storming, stamping "Bravo!" it simply put a lump in your throat, if you thought about it—its generosity, its goodwill, its happiness. And didn't they see that every "Bravo!" they gave to a singer, or a symphony, or the close of a book, was a "Bravo!" to life, that would take a lot of cancelling. By gad, there was a poem lurking here, surely! Now for his pencil and notebook.

And many such thoughts did he think, sitting at his worship of M. Hellesens's orchestra.

But his loneliness in these weeks—to his surprise and discomfort—bred other imaginings than philosophies of life and

dreams of fame. He was alone in a crowded city of pleasure, and feeling more completely alone as the days built up the fortnight. And when on the sands in the mornings he watched the caresses of the courting couples, or in the streets at night the spurious caresses sold by the courtesans, a hunger moved his body and a temptation visited the threshold of his mind. Though he made more and more room for it, as each summer night removed another day from his holiday, he chose to believe that it would remain a debate in his mind and nothing more. He wouldn't really succumb, he supposed. So he listened—listened long and pleasantly to his own arguments. "I am over twenty-one now, and I have a right to know. . . . There cannot be many who haven't found out before this. . . . If ever I am to write I need experience. . . . It's not that there's any danger of *me* becoming a libertine. If I could once learn what this thing is, I don't suppose I should ever want to explore it again. It might be wise to explore it once, and so put one's imagination to rest."

On his last night, as he sat in the Grande Rotonde of the Kursaal, a silent figure among hundreds of laughing groups or happy couples, and the music from the balcony sang and thundered over his head, this ingratiating temptation worked into fuller and fuller occupation of his mind, till at last the crowded people around him were no more clearly seen than figures in a dream and the loudest of the music might have been miles away. "It'll have to be to-night, or not at all. . . . I have a right to know. . . . If ever I am to take this step, it had best be now, while I am in a foreign town. . . . Furtive? . . . Yes, I suppose it is. . . . But how can it ever be done, except furtively? . . ."

The vocalist tripped down the tiers of the balcony and stood at M. Hellesens's side for her song. She was very young, and her diffidence and anxiety were clear to Tony, as she glanced with a trembling smile at the vast audience. All about her was modest: her dress a simple robe of salmon pink, her brown hair parted in the middle and drawn from her brow to a coil at the nape of her neck, her brown skin flushed with nervousness, and her eyes straying to the paintings on the roof. She stood, a splash of pink and brown against the black and white of the orchestra. Her voice shook as it swam into Donizetti's *Air de Lucie de Lammermoor*, but it found its confidence, and then she rested her hands on the cushion of her bosom and sang

happily. As her feeling swelled, she pressed them together or opened them a little way apart in invitation; and her voice, so fresh and clear and exquisitely feminine, sang its way into Tony's hidden and shadowed debate, as if it were the call of the voice of all her sex. He bent his head from her, ashamed that his body should feel empty of all except a weakness and a trembling. Oh, the mystery of it all, for love and pity and infinite tenderness were so large a part of this trembling desire! In it all that was best in him and all that was worst in him seemed to have met and mingled at a single point. How close was the best to the worst! He was poised between the depths and the heights, and he could touch the depths or touch the heights, with a movement scarcely measurable.

The debate was still a warm sea in his head, its waves buffeting one another and settling to no calm, when the orchestra clashed to its last climax. M. Hellesens bowed to the applause, and disappeared. Tony rose with the rest, and fell into the slow stream of people pouring to the doors. He was hardly aware if he went onward or stood still. In the same abstraction he went down the wide staircase and gathered his hat and light overcoat from a steward, and passed under the marble portico into the darkness of the pavement that fronted the courtyard and the carriages. "I have not known. . . . One must arrive. . . . It has to be furtive. . . ." He crossed the courtyard towards the gates and the *Place* beyond, where so many lamp-lit streets converged. "And then, on the other hand, isn't all this timidity rather contemptible? . . . If I do it at all, why not do it boldly, instead of in this conscience-shaking way, like a nervous girl. . . . I don't know. . . . I don't think I'm ashamed of faltering on the brink. . . ."

So he goes, lost and seeking, as every soul in the world.

He emerged from the Kursaal gates on to a pavement of the *Place*. It was only ten o'clock, and through a night bright and warm under a star-sprinkled sky the people were coming and going, in their carriages or on the pavements, in numbers as large and wraps as light as those of the sunny morning hours. Ten o'clock. Inevitably Tony's eyes, directed by his recent thoughts, swung along the pavements to see if any of the ladies of the night were yet abroad. Almost at once he met the merry, inviting eyes of a young girl, whose face had swung

back to him over her shoulder, as she walked steadily onward, round the railings of the Kursaal. Her gait continued the invitation, her steps becoming jaunty, as if the heels of her shoes were exceptionally high; her hips swinging. And she turned her face and looked again. A blush burned at Tony's cheek-bones, and his glance shot away into the road. Then he walked off in the opposite direction. But the pavement, describing a circle round the Kursaal, carried him to the Digue, where he stood to look at the dark shapes of the bathing machines, and the ripples of the sea, as they sighed in luxurious laziness up the sands. All nature was tintured with his thoughts to-night: the air was velvety and warm like a caress, the languor of the sea was a lover's languor, and even a sail that had filled with the breeze was round and smooth and disquieting. He turned about and saw a young girl's spare figure, walking towards him from the other side of the Kursaal; walking with a jaunty step that flashed its invitation. Its dark coat and white fox fur he recognized at once as belonging to the girl who had already sent him the invitation of her eyes. Her face swung to him again; she passed and tossed over her shoulder the same merry smile. As far as he had seen by the light of an arc-lamp, it was an oval face, soft and childish above its froth of white fur; such a face as always went straight to his heart. His throat dried, his inner trembling quickened, and he followed.

"Good evening, dar-leeng," she greeted him, in her foreign accent, when he was passing her.

Discomfort was again hot on his cheek-bones, but he answered her with as much ease as possible.

"Good evening, Mademoiselle."

"You come for a walk—no? It is a lovely night."

He smiled down at her, and she archly up at him.

"Yes," he decided. "If you care to."

"Oh, I love to come. Thank you vary much."

"You are Belgian?" inquired Tony, as they walked on.

"Noh. French, dar-leeng."

"But you speak English very well."

"Ah, yes. I have been in England during two years."

"You seem very young?"

"I am twenty-two."

"You look sixteen."

"Ah, I like you. I like you vary much." And she quickly

put her arm round his waist, and looking up at him, whispered, "I think I like you vary much, dar-leeng."

How that "dar-leeng" hurt him! It surprised him that a word could hurt so. And chasing after his thoughts, even as he walked and talked with her, he supposed it was because he had longed all his life for this word to be given him in a real surrender, and now he had bought it for money.

"What's your name, little one?"

"Thérèse."

"It's a beautiful name, and it suits you—Thérèse."

"I like you to call me 'little one.'"

"Do you? I am glad—my little one."

The word was a tool that cut him as he used it. Turning his eyes down to this little girl's face, which looked up so often from its white fur, he felt no dislike of her—nay, almost an affection, and certainly a quick-beating desire, but his endearing word repelled him like the feel of a false half-crown when it is light as aluminium.

"Oh, but put your arm round my shoulders, will you not?" she pouted. "Hold me close. No one will mind."

Tony blushed that she should have to tell him the rules of procedure like this; and he tried to commute his awkwardness into ease by a gay laugh and the words, "Why certainly, *ma petite*;" and he gathered her small shoulder in his hand, and drew her tight against him. The touch of her body gave him a tremor of pleasure (how different he was from the boy who had been so embarrassed when Emmy Holt, of the Freshwater night, cushioned herself under his arm!); it seemed extraordinarily tender and sweet to hold a childish figure close and protectingly; but the pleasure was marred by a sudden hunger for the real, complete, ecstatic self-giving that he had wanted, and by a disappointment that this spurious performance was not it.

Suddenly she asked him a strange question, and his pride hinted that he lied to her; but he quickly recoiled from a pride so poor, and answered frankly: "No, you're the first, my little one."

And her response was a tight hug.

"I will be good to you," she said.

Their walking along the digue for the next few hundred yards was enclosed in a lovers' silence; and under that silence Tony's mind, darkening with sadness, was shutting its eyes and trying to imagine that the slight body, pressed against his and

abandoned to his will, was the much-loved body of the girl who would one day worship him and desire him. She who would be Juliet to him . . . or Heloise. Let his imagination be strong enough to conceive of Thérèse as her, and then the actual holding of Thérèse should give the same joy, for the touch of one young feminine body must be like the touch of another. But his heart fell as it told him that this was *not* the same—that it was as different as a foggy twilight from a full noon—and he was surprised to find himself seeking a comfort in his disappointment by drawing closer to him this little trivial Juliet—this little paid deputy for Heloise.

“Shall we go now?” she asked.

“Yes, if you like. Is it far?”

“Noh. Only just behind the Kursaal. We have been walking away from it.”

“It is not half-past ten yet, little one.”

“*Ab, n’importe.*”

They turned about, and, interlacing again, walked back along the digue.

“I return to Bruxelles to-morrow, or the next day,” said Thérèse.

“Why? Don’t you live here?”

“Oh, noh. I come here for the season. And Ostend is finished now. Ostend is always finished after the first week in September.”

“Are your—your friends, then, always the visitors?”

“Yes, oh, yes. Nearly always the English boys.”

She had said it wistfully, and Tony took a slight shock.

“You like the English?” he asked, feeling for an answer that would balm the bruise.

“Yes, vary much. They are always the kindest and the most generous.”

“And you think you will do better in Brussels than here?”

“But yes! *Naturellement.* It is difficult here. There are not many houses where we can get a room in Ostend. It was not so once; but it is now. They are afraid of the police. In Brussels—no.”

The police! Fear joined the many thoughts in Tony’s mind and was for a time the loudest visitor in that room. He sickened with shame: shame that he should be engaged in a traffic that offended the police of Ostend, and a greater shame that he should play the coward about it. Truly there was

little but shames to be found down the road he was treading now.

Behind the Kursaal they walked into a street of arc lamps, she unafraid of the people's eyes, and he, though feigning a self-possession and a gaiety, anxious to escape under cover. She drew him across a road that was still a-rattle with horse-hoofs, and stepped into a quieter street that ran at an angle from this main thoroughfare. It was a street of shops, but their plate-glass windows were now dark and blinded, and the pavements under them were almost deserted. One or two of the windows on the upper floors were alight; and one or two people walked rapidly along the echoing flags to their homes. Each of these lighted windows and each of these people was a spring of fear to Tony. At a tall narrow door between two of the glass shop-fronts, Thérèse stopped and rang; and together they stood on the pavement, the girl's feet jiggling merrily.

Now a semicircle of light had created the fanlight over the door; the handle was being turned, and the door pulled with difficulty from its jamming. It disclosed the figure of a tall, full-bosomed girl, who met them with some casual phrase that sounded like, "*Entrez, mademoiselle.*"

Leaving the door agape, she walked back to the first room on the right to open it for them and switch on its electric lamps.

"Come in, dar-leeng," said Thérèse.

They both followed the tall, capable girl into the ground-floor front room that she had illumined for them. In its bright light Tony saw that it was a typical Ostend *chambre à louer*: a large mahogany bed pushed against the further wall, with a mahogany dressing-table shouldering its side against the back of the bed; a mahogany and horsehair sofa against the nearer wall; heavy curtains over the windows, and a huge gilt mirror leaning above the mantelpiece and reflecting a tilted segment of the room. The tall, capable girl, her back to them, was busying herself for their comfort, drawing closer the folds of the curtains, lifting off the counterpane of the bed, pummelling the cushions on chairs and sofa. Tony was shocked at the indifference and efficiency of this young, comely creature. Thérèse, meanwhile, had gone opposite the gold mirror and was removing her hat and touching her curls. He saw now that she was pretty above most, her forehead broad and crowned with fair, curled hair, her features small, her cheeks full and

smooth under their powder, her lips shapely and apart and lovable, even under their borrowed vermilion.

Now the tall, capable girl, her tasks completed, came to Tony with an open palm. Nonplussed and frightened, he did not catch her meaning; but Thérèse explained.

"Oh, I see," Tony acknowledged. "Thank you;" and with a blush of shame for his ignorance, he fumbled for his pocket case, drew it out, and with insecure fingers disengaged a ten-franc note.

"That will do," he said, in what was meant to be a lordly fashion, as he handed it to the girl. "Never mind the change."

And immediately the girl, as if eager to escape with her luck, departed without a word of thanks or demurring.

"Oh, you fool!" Thérèse rebuked, but gently, and with a charming glance from under her eyebrows. "You give her too much. She laugh at you."

"Can't be helped," answered Tony jocularly, though saddened at this chaffering.

Thérèse doffed her coat; and Tony's heart began to race with fright . . . with shame . . . and with quickening desire. This was the first time that a girl had unveiled herself before him. But almost before his shaking hands had laid away his overcoat Thérèse had jumped upon his knee and was caressing his cheek with her hand and saying, "Dar-leeng!" His hand felt her waist and breast, and suddenly all his distaste and heartache were forgotten, and he drew her into his hunger, pressing—so strange it was!—both the worst of him and the best of him upon her lips: pressing thither not only his lust but his whelming humanity too.

A quarter of an hour later, and he was conscious that there was nothing left in him but pity and tenderness. The worst being satisfied the best could play. He asked her gently how she entered upon her present life, and she told him a story which, though it conformed to a standardized shape, came from her lips with the simplicity of truth. She had had a fiancé who had left her with a baby—"Ah, mais il est brave, mon bébé"—and she had fled from her parents and put the child with some cottagers, and come to Brussels to find money enough for herself and him. "If I work in a shop, I do not make enough, but

now—in a few years I shall have enough to start a little business of my own, and he will live with me. *Voilà !*” Tony preferred to believe it true.

There was a silence, and then she said, “ You go now—no ? ”

“ Well, yes, I suppose so,” he laughed.

Quickly she slid from his arms and switched up the light. The clock on the mantelpiece showed them that it wanted half an hour to midnight. To his surprise Thérèse began to dress hurriedly.

“ You too, *darleeng*,” she hinted, with a smile.

Then he understood : she was going out into the street again. The former distaste came back and constricted his heart, but he cloaked it under merry sentences and gave her her wish. To his merry talk she returned but formal answers, so busy was she with her fingers and her comb and her mirror, so eager to complete this attiring and to take her place on the pavements again, before her sisters should have forestalled her. Once, sitting down to draw on her stocking, she made a grimace and said, “ Oh, my foot, my foot ! ” and held it out for him to see. It was a pretty little foot, but inflamed. “ Too much walking ; too much walking,” said she. “ Ah, well ; ” and she hurried on the stocking.

He too dressed quickly, not wishing to be a hindrance to her. Coming to his pocket case, he gave her, in a sudden uprush of generosity, and remembering what she had said about the English boys, one of Mr. Doyly’s five-pound notes.

“ *Voilà*,” said he, smiling as he tried his French. “ *C’est pour vous et pour votre bébé.* ”

She recognized the value of the note and cried, “ *Ah, vous êtes gentil, vous êtes gentil !* ” and folded it happily into her hand-bag ; after which she turned to the mirror that she might powder her face and finger her mouth with her lip-salve.

Standing behind her and tracing the childish lines of her figure, he wondered what he thought of this girl who for a space had taken him into so intimate a union and was now hurrying out of his life for ever. None of the sentimental admiration which some of his favoured authors had pronounced, nor any of the contempt which the righteous must affect ; but a deep compassion, certainly, and a swelling gratitude that was emotional rather than reasoned. He felt that when, in a moment now, he must say good-bye he would like to kiss her, not amorously, but reverently. To her little shallow

mind, his kiss would mean no more than that she must believe in his gratitude rather than his contempt, but to his own thinking, it would be a ceremonial kiss, offered as a recompense and a plea for forgiveness from all his kind.

He walked up to her and put his arm about her shoulder, while she was giving the last touches to her hair and her hat in the mirror. With his other hand he turned up her chin that he might print his ceremonial kiss on her mouth.

“Good-bye, my little one.”

But before he could reach her mouth, she had turned her face to one side and presented to him her full cheek.

“Not there,” she smiled, pointing to the newly painted lips. “Not there. You spoil them. Kiss me on the cheek—do you mind?”

Dulled by this unexpected rebuff to his fine thinking, he kissed the cheek perfunctorily; and together they walked to the front door, where she shook his hand and smilingly repeated her “*Vous êtes gentil*,” and ran up the street in the direction opposite to his own.

PART IV

CHAPTER I

PEGGY JOINS THE MAJORITY

HALF-TERM had gone by, and the Christmas holidays were drawing towards Stratton Lye fast as a cantering horse; and ahead of them came a flying missive from Peggy: Tony must, *must*, MUST give his four weeks to them in their Southend vicarage. In her lively words there was a new affectionateness which lit an instant response in him, but, after a second and third reading, made him wonder if it sprang from a disappointment and a loneliness. Surely this warm letter had burst from a pain suppressed. And when on the 19th of December he alighted from the train on to the South-end platform, he caught from her eyes the same expression of a new-born interest. She was a little shy, and so was he, and they shook hands with roaming glances; but each felt that, hidden behind their shynesses, two new affections were indulging in a mutual peep.

"O Tony, it's jolly," she exclaimed. "It's ripping of you to come. It's years since I've seen you. Hundreds and hundreds of years."

"It's three months, to be accurate."

"Yes, but I mean *properly*. I haven't seen you properly since I was married. We're going to have enormous talks. I want to talk about old times and our holidays at Freshwater and funny old Captain Alum and—oh, heaps of things. Do you mind?"

"I shall survive it, I expect."

"Yes, do if you can." The ice broken, her talk flowed over him like rapids. "Tony: I so seldom see any of the Family now. And they're the world's worst correspondents; I *do* think they ought to write sometimes to the one member of the Family who's left them for this outpost of civilization. You see, *you're* all together in the holidays and have all each other's news;

you ought to send some of it along to poor *me*, who wants some of the crumbs that fall from the rich man's table, and the dogs licked his sores. This is my taxi. Hop in. . . . Tony: Joyce has only written about three times, Keatings once, and Derek not at all. Do you know, I've felt it so much that I suddenly realized how beastly we'd all been in not writing regularly to Father, and I send him a long letter every week, and he writes lovingly back—my only relative who writes to me. He knows all about your coming, and says he's going to think of us together on Christmas Day, and lift his glass to us, his two youngest—bless his dear old heart! He's still in Belgium, living on the cheap. I hoped you might run into him, when you were over there in the summer."

"Belgium's rather a large place. One can quite easily miss people."

"Yes, I suppose you can. But, Tony: even if he is living in sin, he's a darling. I love him much better now than ever I did when I lived in the same house. So I do you. I suppose that's often the way. It's a dreadful indictment on the human race, isn't it?—that it's almost impossible to live with each other and to love each other. What pigs we must be!"

Tony put his hand on the taxi door. "Here, I'm going back. I don't want to be hated."

"No, don't be a donkey: it takes more than four weeks. I can endure you and love you for that period. I wouldn't vouch for five weeks, though; and, Tony——" She stopped and continued: "You know, in theory I love everybody in the world, and I think I really do. *Really*. I find the smelliest tramps quite adorable, and O Tony! as for the East End costers who crowd down Southend High Street on a Bank Holiday with their toy balloons and 'tittlers' and their ladies in ostrich feathers and their choruses and their patience—oh, I defy anyone to see them without wanting to kiss them all."

"I know what you mean," said Tony. "They have an effect on me, but they don't make me want to kiss them. They make me want to write greater poetry than the world has ever seen."

"Yes, I suppose that's the way it takes you—exactly the same thing and entirely different. Don't you sometimes think you and I are very much alike? *Do* say you do."

"I don't know."

"Oh yes, we are. I was quite sure of it during the

Communion Service last Sunday. And I gave more thought to it in the evening when I had to go to some old meeting in the town—for the Society for the Prevention of Missions to Seamen—or one of those things. And I decided that yes, it was so. But to return to me. I really love everybody in the world, but I want to live with nobody. It's fear : fear of not loving *one*. By the by, did you know that I was a Christian Socialist ? I didn't know myself till I discovered that Michael was one and expected me to be. I was delighted. Good gracious ! I haven't talked so much for years ; it's topping, and here we are ! ”

St. Blaise's Vicarage, a gabled house of red brick and red tiles, stood within the square asphalted yard of St. Blaise's Church, and proclaimed its legitimate cohabitation with the church by a Gothic front door. To this door Peggy ran ahead, and flung it open with her latch key.

“ Enter, Tony. Come right in to tea.”

Tony had not completed his glance at her drawing-room before he knew that the whole place, with its cushions, its flowers, and its tea set out on an occasional table, was on parade for him : the silver was new-polished and standing at rather conscious attention ; the sugared cakes had been lovingly chosen and were arrayed in a pleasing pattern ; the flowers had come from the florist's that morning and were posed like coryphées when the curtain lifts on the ballet. And he was sure that Peggy, before she set out to meet him at the station, had given one last look to her room, and had stepped back and rearranged a flower or a cushion.

“ Is Michael coming ? ” he asked, as he sat in a corner of the long Chesterfield.

“ No, he's out somewhere.”

“ Busy, I suppose, just before Christmas ? ”

“ Oh, yes, I expect so.” (Was she speaking with less ease ?)

“ You've never told me how you like being a Vicar's wife.”

“ Oh, it's awful fun. Especially the more vulgar parishioners, and Tony : they *can* be adorably vulgar in these parts. And some of those who aren't quite as vulgar as the others, are dreadfully snobbish about it—but that's rather sweet too, isn't it ? One or two of them are saints of God, as you always find.”

“ And you're a success ? ”

“ Rather ! Yes, I've no doubts on that score. They say I'm a ‘ nice little person. ’ They like me—but not as they do Michael, of course. He starts with the enormous advantage

of his cassock and his cape and his carburettor—his biretta, that is. I can't catch *those* up. They worship him."

"And are you as madly in love with him as ever?"

At once he knew that he had been tactless: Peggy's eyes, glancing at him, had been frightened before they smiled.

"Yes, of course."

A silence dropped, fortunately disturbed by the sound of the hall-door shutting. Peggy's voice called: "Michael. Come and see Tony."

"Right-ho!" The reply was as genial as ever, and Father Michael came after it into the room: a tall figure in an untidy cassock and cape; thin-featured and friendly-eyed, but—how *was* it?—he had advanced much further into middle age than was warranted by the two years since Tony had last seen him. In two short years he had collected its greyness over the ears, its thinness on the crown of the head, and its chickeny skin at the adam's apple in the throat. From several symptoms—from the yellowness on the rim of his clerical collar, the absence of a cuff at his wrist, a razor cut on his cheek and another under his chin—Tony suspected that this man who had appeared when presented to the O'Grogans as so brisk and dapper was in truth relaxed and lazy. His geniality was the same, however. He offered his right hand to Tony, and placed his left hand on the boy's shoulder, and said: "Well now; this is excellent."

"Michael: don't you think my Tony's growing rather fine?" asked Peggy, when their polite exchanges were releasing them to sit down.

"*Please*, Peggy," her brother demurred.

"Well, you *are*; and I am ever so proud of you. I'm longing to show you off in church." As she said it, she took her handkerchief and removed a grease stain from her husband's cassock, an attention which he received with a smile. Now the talk played again behind the teacups, but it had lost its spontaneity: brother and sister both perceived that it had become a traffic in formal inquiries and feigned interests, and Peggy soon withdrew from it into silence. Tony, though aware that he was not interesting Father Michael very much, pushed in front of him his ambling information, and knew that it was moving with as little ease as a hobbled donkey in a field. His old embarrassment in this stranger's presence grew upon him till it was a darkness; and when Peggy suggested that he and she

went up to his room to unpack, he experienced a quick relief, like shutters opening to the daylight.

Michael left them to themselves again after dinner, proffering his sermons as an excuse, and they talked the evening away. It was after ten o'clock when Peggy said: "Go and see what Michael's doing;" and Tony walked out and across the hall to the study.

"Oh, come in, come in, old man," Michael's voice called to his knock, and Tony pushed open the door.

Father Saffery's study was a small square room, too heavily assertive of its master's calling. It always made Tony think of a short, fat man, recently converted to Anglo-Catholicity and displaying with more zeal than intelligence, all over his body the insignia and trinkets of a dozen Catholic guilds. In the corner that faced you as you entered was a statuette of the Madonna, bright with blue and gold paint, and you felt that she was meant to be the presiding genius of the room; a big crucifix, reaching to the picture rail, bent forward over the Vicar's littered desk, as if blessing all that might be transacted there; a *prie-Dieu* with another crucifix and candlesticks and several black manuals, stood in a corner like a mercy-seat where God Himself might be approached for his assistance in the work; a "Churchman's Almanack" hung from the bell-push to give the work direction; in the tall shelves innumerable theological books, including all Father Faber's books and many volumes of Liguori's "Moral Theology," ranged themselves untidily for the work's advising; and, extended in the single arm-chair, with his knees higher than his chin, reclined the Vicar himself, engaged on a sixpenny novel.

"Hallo, Tony," he greeted, half rising. "Here; have my chair, won't you?" and on Tony's declining, he sank back relieved. "Well, sit down somewhere. Yes, I'll come and see Peggy soon, but let's have a talk first."

He laid the novel face upwards on his lap, put his elbows on the arms of the chair, locked his fingers together, and disposed himself for conversation. Tony pulled up the chair from the writing-table, and sat down, resting his elbows on his knees. But despite Michael's amity, naturalness would not sit itself between them; and the talk only slipped its hobbles when it discovered itself as an argument on Anglo-Catholicism and Socialism. Then the Vicar expressed himself with an amazing fluency and a bursting utterance that was, however, always held

in courteous check and always patient of his visitor's views. But, even so, Tony had that curious sense that nine-tenths of Father Michael's arguments were designed for the decoration of himself rather than for the conversion of his visitor, and that, however courteously he might wait till Tony's interpolation had concluded, he was not really listening to any other words than his own, but was inwardly threading a necklace of new sentences with which to add to his own decoration when his turn should come.

For nearly an hour this argument must have continued; and it was still bouncing to and fro as they walked back to the drawing-room. Tony entered first, and took a knock of sorrow to see Peggy sitting in a gilt chair with sad and distant eyes, her elbow resting on its arm, and her cheek sleeping in her tired hand. Arousing herself with a start, she sloughed off the sadness like a bad dream, and met them with smiles.

The days convinced Tony: Peggy and Michael, behind a window-dressing of good humour, had sundered. And the knowledge set him brooding. Peggy had loved this Father Michael with all that perfection which Tony himself longed to take from someone and to pour back in return, and in two years it had sunk down into an empty tolerance. And in so sinking had it not disproved itself? Was there then no such thing as a love which endured? He had believed, and still believed, that a perfect union with another fellow-creature was the one thing which could give completion to life, and that without it all else in the world must dim its beauty and don shadows of pain; and was it nowhere to be found? Were we all cheated by a transient gleam ahead? No, no! Peggy had been unfortunate; that was all. If it had not endured for her, then Michael was not her true love. Twenty years older than she! She had blundered. One must not give up faith in the perfect thing, because a sister had guessed wrong. One must not blunder; that was all.

Tony was seeing Michael's character now. In the old days before the marriage, the Father's manner, like his dress, had been tidy and well-ordered, and none of his character had come past it; but now he was wearing his own clothes. And it was no very unamiable character; just an ordinary one; but by

its ordinariness it had failed Peggy. Like many priests who had no taskmaster over them, he was indolent—but then so were most men. On week mornings, ten minutes before eight, when the bell of St. Blaise's had for some time been ringing the people to Mass, Tony would hear the Vicar leaping out of bed, bustling about his room, opening his door and running downstairs like a late schoolboy; and at breakfast Tony would keep his eyes from the too evident fact that St. Blaise's priest that morning had ministered at the altar unshaved. He was irritable sometimes with his wife—but then how many husbands were not? In his sermons he acted a part—but then, what else was it possible for him to do? His profession had cast him for the part, and he must play it out.

None the less, these sermons, delivered so quietly and with such an effect of packed emotion, and of insatiable love for souls, affronted Tony, who knew how much of the preacher's time was spent on his bed or in his arm-chair. Did many commonplace priests, after their long course of half-unconscious hypocrisy, attain to this very real histrionic power, their one remarkable gift? Just remember his own father, or look at this brother-in-law of his! Once inside the walls of his church and vested in alb and amice and stole, he could create his part as perfectly as the most accomplished character actor. And always the Peggys of the world—not only the foolish women but the Peggys—would come to the feet of such men, and believe, and perhaps break themselves there. Why, Father Michael's rôle in church would have deceived Tony himself, had he not seen the actor in his dressing-room.

And if all its tinsel and buckram could be revealed to him by a few days' intercourse, how quickly it must have hurt a clear spiritual vision like young Peggy's. Poor Peggy! He didn't like to think of Peggy being disappointed.

Many times he found himself catching her thoughts and feeling a hurt in them. Her conscience sent her to every service her husband conducted, and into her modest seat at the back of the church; and Tony's new fraternal affection sent him along with her, and on to the hassock next hers; and if it were ten minutes before Low Mass, he felt Peggy's knowledge that the celebrating priest, in his Vicarage across the yard, had not yet hurled off his blankets and hurried into his bedroom slippers; and if it were sermon time at High Mass and Father Michael

were preaching very earnestly, he saw her eyes avoid the pulpit, and knew that the addresses wounded her. Sometimes he went with her on her round of the parish streets, and when the simple women, to whom she had brought some comforts, came to the doors and greeted her with: "O ma'am, what a *lovely* sermon yer 'usband give us last night!" he watched her answer with a grateful smile, and knew that, behind the smile, her sense of truth had been chafed. Sometimes he sat in the drawing-room and listened while silly ladies, over her teacups, enlarged on her husband's saintliness, or on her good fortune in being his wife, or on her wonderful privilege of assisting in the noble work of a priest "who was always going about doing good," and he almost felt the laugh that trembled in Peggy as she bethought herself that Michael, at the moment, was shut up in his study with a sixpenny novel.

So Peggy had flowered into nothing more uncommon than a *hausfrau*—Michael's *hausfrau*, doing the better part of her husband's work in the streets of his parish. Was it good enough? Had not Peggy been a seed of brighter promise than that? But then: was it not true of nearly all people that they were made for more than they achieved? The forest was packed with seeds of which only one or two had the luck or the room to grow into tall trees. And to the larger minds were not the many unfulfilled seeds as lovely and as interesting as the few fulfilled? If there was going to be nothing epic about Peggy, well, perhaps one could see her as the more beautiful for that, because she was going to be typical of the great majority.

Peggy uncovered herself to him before he departed. He had encouraged her to it. A polite silence extending over the last days between her and Michael had told him that, behind their window-dressing, there had been a sharper breach than usual; and he was so touched by her gaiety in front of him and her remoteness when she supposed he wasn't looking that his romantic desire to act the strong supporting brother swelled up in him, and he resolved to lure her into speech; it would relieve her, he thought; it would lift for a while the burden of her hypocrisy.

He began by discussing her religion. Could she really swallow all the paraphernalia of Catholicity? "Frankly, Peggy, can you?"

And she seemed delighted to pour out her spiritual history ; she settled down to it on the sofa, throwing her arms along its back and looking at him with laughing eyes. She told him how, one day, a sentence in one of Michael's sermons—"Michael's, of all people ! Wasn't that strange, Tony. I always like to think it was *his* sermon"—had given her a complete release from mental worry. He had been speaking of dogmas and ceremonies, and he suddenly said : " You must always remember that the best in this kind are but parables ; parables shadowing forth truths that could not otherwise be hinted to our finite minds ; " and the minute he said that everything had leapt into clearness.

" Tony : it was wonderful. I suddenly saw that whatever we believe and practise down here, we shall find, when we die and enter upon a larger vision, that it was all terribly childish. And Tony : I saw that in this respect the most intellectual conceptions of the modernists were probably no nearer the real, untellable truth, and not half so expressive, and not half so simple, and not half so free from pride, as the comparatively crude sacramentalism of the Catholics of all ages. I saw they would never satisfy me. Perhaps they ought to—but I can't help it—I'm not made that way. You see, I'm incurably Christian at heart ; I am—*really* ! By that I mean that everything Christ said and did, and everything the best of his followers said and did, has always, all my life, simply *screamed* its truth at me ; so the only question was, what sort of religious practice and discipline was I to go in for ? And I have chosen that which was good enough for the Catholics of all the ages. And honestly, Tony, it dovetails most marvellously with my nature, such as it is."

Tony thought long on all this, and at last commented :

" So you're perfectly happy, are you ? "

" Happy ! " She glanced up, and immediately sent to him that artificial smile which was always at her service now. " Oh, yes."

" Really happy ? "

" Yes. . . . Why should you ask ? Don't I look it ? "

" Not always."

" Oh, I'm sorry to hear that ! " She settled herself into the corner of the sofa, to look at him better. " I thought I was one of the world's bright and cheery souls. But I'm glad you told me. I'll start at once the Brighter Peggy Movement."

"Don't be facetious, when I want to be serious. Are you as happy as you expected to be?"

If she were to abandon facetiousness she must withdraw her stare from him; she directed it into the fire and did not answer.

"Are you, dear?" he repeated.

"No, Tony. Of course not. We never are. Not as happy as we expected to be."

Silence succeeded this; and Tony's gaze had gone the same way as hers—into the fire.

"But, Tony, I'm quite fairly happy, all the same."

"Tell me what's missing."

Her unanswering silence proved her desire to speak.

"Tell me, Peggy. Tell me what's missing."

"Oh, nothing," she murmured. "Nothing much. Only perfection, and we're fools to expect that."

"Perfection of what?"

"Love," Peggy murmured.

After another silence Tony asked, "Won't things come right again?"

She shook her head.

"Not back to where they were when we first discovered one another. I can imagine many things, but I can't imagine that. They're really almost as right as they'll ever be now, Tony; and it's not so bad. He accepts the position and sees my good points, and I've heaps of them; and I accept all his good points, and he's got heaps of them, too . . . and I'm grateful to him for much . . . and fond of him, so that . . . but, Tony"—her lip trembled—"I wanted to *love*, not to *accept*. That's what breaks my heart, if I dare to think: I wanted to *love*, not to accept."

CHAPTER II

AND STILL THEY PUT FORTH IN HOPE

AND then Joyce married at Easter ; not a novelist, as she had once vowed she would do, but Len Daubeny, of the Indian Army, and the son of a retired Indian Army general, who lived in an old house on Chiswick Mall. Len Daubeny had been observed drifting in front of their windows, back and forth again, with an innocence too pronounced to be innocent ; and Joyce, after examining him in detail from behind her lace curtains, and deciding that his height was six feet and that his eyes were the kind, blue eyes that India gave, and that his skin was the interesting sallow brown with which that country also decorated its servants, told Keatings to go out and collect him. Keatings had little difficulty in effecting the acquaintance, for poor Len Daubeny was desperately offering himself for capture—his leave from India would not last for ever. This was in early spring, and thereafter he was a daily companion of Joyce and a nightly visitor at their house. And on Palm Sunday, after church, which Joyce, impressed by the Major-General's sidesmanship, had begun to attend again, he asked her if she would return with him to India and share a poor man's bungalow at Rawal Pindi or Peshawar. And Joyce looked frightened for a moment, and then said she would love to.

So in Easter week they were to be married by special licence in Chiswick Parish Church, by the river. And Derek, as dispassionate as ever, but fortunately no less pompous, announced that his present to the bride would be to pay all the expenses of a large Reception at Chiswick Town Hall ; which caused Joyce to fling her arms around him and kiss him as " an old darling, too good to live. And to Tony, who was home again for the Easter holidays, Keatings commented : " With Peggy

and Joyce both gone, I've made up my mind to remain a bachelor and stay at home and look after the old lady. Derek'll go off as soon as it suits him; that's certain enough; he'll retire to bachelor chambers of his own, or he'll marry a fat woman with a large enough fortune. But I'm glad young Joyce is marrying. The Daubenys haven't much money, but they're Sahibs, and it's another jar for the Gabriels."

The little riverside church was crowded for the wedding, so popular had Joyce made herself in Chiswick and Fleet Street; and an Easter sunlight streamed upon the heads of the people. The dust motes were alight and jubilant in its rays. Why dust motes, dancing in their beam of light, should express melancholy rather than jubilation Tony was not prepared to consider, but as he stood, elaborately dressed, in his front pew on the bride's side of the church, and gazed at Joyce's slim white back and the folds of her falling veil, and the trembling of the spring flowers in her hand, and then at the square, sober shoulders, well braced, and the neat head of Len Daubeny, he filled with pity. Joyce, from the nape of her neck to her high-poised heel, with her shoulders steady but her arms faintly vibrating, was beautiful as a gazelle tense for alarm; and so was Len Daubeny; beautiful as a still, curbed horse. Tony sank into brooding. What might be the prank of the gods in making for themselves these shapely playthings, so exquisitely nervous and tuned for pain, and then driving them together, and leaving them to break? If you thought of it, there was a splendid foolhardiness about all young men and young women who married, for, though in their heart of hearts they suspected that all their predecessors who had put to sea on this venture had foundered out of sight, yet always they volunteered to undertake it again, and put forth in the plucky hope that with them at least it would be different. And a crowd of brave, uncomplaining people, all of whom believed in secret that these new adventurers were doomed like the rest, assembled to support them in their start and to flourish gallantly a soiled old creed of success.

"It is all rather splendid," thought Tony.

But Joyce would be happier than Peggy; not as happy as she expected to be, for sure; but happier than Peggy, just because she was less intense and had never been vexed by these same playful gods with too much spiritual sight. Always her vitality would burst up into high spirits, as surely as Peggy's

flowed into brow-crumpling thoughts. But for *him*, give him a wife like Peggy, hungry for perfections, and with grave eyes that looked beyond the world to immortal goals.

But no. In his present rebellion against the gods, he was almost persuading himself that he, for one, would not play their game for them; *he* would not allow them to breathe this lying mist of love on to the clear sight which was with him now. And he was just blowing up an anger with himself for having been, so far, one of the keenest, aptest, forwardest exponents of their game, when his eyes fell on the back of the youngest bridesmaid.

It was a back as beautiful as Joyce's—nay, more beautiful, he thought. Those wide little shoulders, square with the little nape, and emphasizing the neat waist, and then answered by the widening hips—it was rather “ravishing”—the word jumped into sight. Len Daubeny's two sisters were to be the bridesmaids, so he had been told; and ravishing indeed they looked, with their dresses of pink silk and old lace, their large picture hats over gold-shot hair, and their bouquets of pink tulips in their white-gloved hands. The elder one was tall and slender as Joyce; the younger a little shorter and broader, but with a schoolgirl's figure, nevertheless; and it so happened that, tired of looking at Archdeacon Gabriel, the Vicar of Chiswick, and the Rev. Warner Gabriel who were praying over Len and Joyce, she turned round to see the congregation, and met Tony's eyes staring at her. As if on a spring, her face went back to its duties; but from that minute Tony's eyes were tethered to her rose-clad figure; he watched her only, as she stood beside her taller sister, or walked up to the altar, or played abstractedly with the bouquet of pink tulips in her hand.

The Town Hall, decorated under the inspiration of Derek, drew approving gasps from the people, as they crowded in to their tables. Everywhere among the green palms and ferns was the bridesmaids' pink: it appeared in tulips and hydrangeas and carnations, and the platform was as a florist's shop or a flower show on Hydrangea Day. And thus the two pink bridesmaids, sitting at the central table, seemed the heart of the room, rather than the white bride, and the jokes flying towards them from the other tables, either demanded whether they had been dressed under the personal supervision of Derek, or prophesied that that when the feast was over and the guests

dispersed, they would be carried away with the other flowers in the florist's van.

And after the toasts had been pledged, after Archdeacon Gabriel had made a graceful, if a rather sanctimonious speech, and Derek had made a pompous one, and Keatings had looked down on his plate in a general shame for his relatives, and the tables had broken up, and that faint air of sadness was mixing with the afternoon sunlight in the room, Tony, who had been watching the younger bridesmaid all the time, walked up to her where she stood alone by a tall window, staring down into Sutton Court Road. She brought her face round to his approach.

"I suppose you are my sister now," he said.

After looking him up and down, she allowed her eyes to fold with amusement.

"Oh, I hope so!"

The words shot into him a thrust of delight.

"And I too," he said.

"You're Joyce's brother, aren't you? She's talked a lot about you. Of course: you're Tony."

"And I don't even know your name!"

"Don't you?" She feigned a hurt. "Well, you ought to. Len ought to have talked a tremendous lot about me to all of you people, but that's just the sort of thing he wouldn't do: the chump! And hasn't Joyce mentioned me at all?"

"No, I'm afraid not. Not to me."

"Oh!" She made with her lips a pout of displeasure. "That *is* disappointing. Well . . . can't be helped. . . . I suppose I made no impression on her. I suppose I'm not really a vivid personality."

"I think you're the vividest person here."

This retort, instant and automatic, surprised himself and lifted a colour to his cheek as well as to hers.

"Oh!" When she had recovered and could play at humour again, she laughed. "Thank you. You've saved my day from disaster."

"What *is* your name?"

"Honor. And if you want me to respect you, for pity's sake, don't say 'I could not love thee, dear, so much, Loved I not Honour more,' because—do you know, I've lived twenty years in the world, and I've never met a single person who didn't make an idiot of themselves sooner or later, and say that."

"Any other names?"

"No other that I'm not ashamed of."

"What is it?"

"Mary. But I don't answer to it."

"'Honor Mary Daubeny.' What a lovely succession of syllables! 'Honor Mary.'"

"Oh, but it sounds so like *Hail, Mary*, doesn't it? Let's see: 'Tony.' I can't make fun of your name. 'Antony.' Oh, yes, I can, though. There was a saint called Antony, wasn't there?"

"Yes. He sold all he had and gave it to the poor, and went and lived a hermit's life in the Egyptian desert."

"But how dull!"

"And there he was visited in person by the devil who sorely tempted him."

"Oh, that was better. And do you think you are like him?"

"No. . . . At least, only in being sorely tempted just now."

"How? Do tell me. I love hearing about other people's temptations. I've told you mine."

Mischievously he looked into her eyes and on to her cheek and mouth. "Lots of ways. But most of them I can't tell you. Here's a minor one. I've been tempted for some time to break off one of those tulips from your bouquet and steal it for myself."

"One of my tulips? Why should you want one of them?"

"Because—well, since you ask it, because you are looking rather beautiful, and one of your tulips would remind me of what you looked like to-day. . . . Oh, don't be huffy; it's quite impersonal. Any beautiful picture would make me feel the same about it. I should buy a little photogravure copy of it before I left the gallery. There's no sense in being angry, if you dress yourselves up to make fools of us, and we promptly oblige." And, having explained the nature of the temptation, he yielded to it. "Thank you," he said, holding the tulip in his hand.

"Well!" exclaimed Honor, rather inadequately, but pretending to amazement at his impudence.

"And now let's talk about something else," said Tony.

Honor rearranged the flowers of the bouquet so as to conceal

its wound. "Tell me something about yourself, brother, what you do, and all that."

"Officially I teach small boys in a prep-school; actually I try to write."

"To write what?"

"I hardly like to say. It sounds so dreadful. But I try to write poetry."

Honor seemed much interested.

"Oh, you must show me some of it. I've a sort of feeling that it's quite good. Yes, I should have thought you were a poet."

"God help us, no! I hope I don't look like one, do I?"

"No, but you talk like one."

"Do I? Not usually, I think. When I have a subject before my eyes that would inspire a clod, perhaps I do."

"Oh, be quiet. . . ."

"And what do *you* do for a living? Anything?"

"No. What can one do in this backwater of civilization called Chiswick? But I've got to do something soon, because we've no money, which is always so awfully tedious, isn't it? In Chiswick, and with no money, nothing desperate or dangerous can possibly happen, and I feel I want something like that. As it is, I'm going to be made into a secretary."

"I should have thought that you were more likely to be made into a wife."

"Lordy, no! That would be almost as dull. I'm never going to marry."

"Why not?"

"Because I hate domesticity. I help Mummy with the housekeeping, and though I don't show it to her, I loathe it, and loathe it and loathe it and loathe it."

A shrill voice called her, "Honor! Honor!" and they swung round their heads to see her sister bearing through the people like a graceful yacht. "Honor. They're off. Len and Joyce are off; their car is at the door. And we're going immediately after them——" She paused, recognizing that Tony had been in conversation with her sister, and looked apologetically at him. And Tony observed how like she was, this taller and slenderer sister, to Honor; she was Honor in oval shape.

"Jill, let me present your brother to you," said Honor.

"This is Tony O'Grogan. He's most anxious to be a good brother, and he's begun by stealing one of my angel flowers."

Jill and Tony made their bows to each other, but little was said, for Jill drew them to the steps of the Town Hall to throw confetti and rice and banter at the departing couple. Tony joined in the riot, but beneath the surface of clowning and shouting, his thoughts were running in an underground stream on the little wide-shouldered bridesmaid whose voice was still in his ears. He hastened back to her side that he might help her into her car; and he waved his tulip at her triumphantly when she was borne away, waving too.

All that evening he was apart from the others and restless: reason was shut down: will and direction had gone from his thoughts: he just floated and drifted on his memories of Honor: pacing up and down his room, with a heart deliciously irregular and a throat deliciously alight. As soon as darkness fell, he could hold himself no longer but went out that he might pass by, and loiter near, the windows of her house on the Mall. He saw nothing of her, not even a shadow behind a blind, but he was hardly disappointed; it was enough to be alone in the cold air with his thoughts of her—of her shoulders and back, of the movements of her mouth, and of her eyes folding with amusement; it was pleasant to walk home with them, and to escape to his bedroom, where he could put out the light and get into bed behind a closed door and sink into the warmth of these thoughts, in the hope that they would take shape as dreams, or fly from his window on telepathic waves and visit her sleep.

In the morning after breakfast, the sun still blessing the spring day with a summer heat, he was loitering in the road that gave on to the Mall, that he might see her if she left her house. And in mid-morning she appeared, with a string bag for her shopping in her hand: he knew immediately that those wide little shoulders were hers and not Jill's. He retired under cover, allowed her to pass, and followed at a distance, awaiting his chance to contrive a natural meeting. She had turned down Chiswick Lane to make for the shops on the Chiswick High Road, and he fetched a compass round a parallel road and

encountered her on the crowded shopping pavement with a surprised and delighted, "Hallo! my sister!"

She laughed to see him.

"Is that our Tony? Are you housekeeping like me?"

"I'm shopping. . . . No, I'm not. I'll be honest in Honor's presence: I'm acting."

"Acting?"

"Yes, I'm pretending I met you by accident, whereas I've been waiting all the morning for you to appear, and cursing you for your delay."

"But what on earth for?"

"What on earth for? I wonder. Is it peace, Jehu? I suppose I came because I thought I'd like to be a brother to you, and help you with your loathed housekeeping. Give me that bag to carry."

She gave it to him, protesting, "But brothers don't do that. They're not nice enough."

"Is it to the milliner's we go first, or to the modiste's?"

"It's neither; it's the greengrocer's. Lordy, how I hate it all! A greengrocer's is a disgusting place. No one should have to go out and collect the roots that they're humiliated into eating—and the branches, and the seeds. It's work that should be hidden from sight and done by slaves."

"One of your slaves shall carry for you to-day."

"That's why I'm never going to marry. Not unless some hugely wealthy nabob buys me at a figure——"

"Oh, yes, you will. Joyce said much the same sort of thing, and she succumbed to Len at once."

"Yes. Fancy anyone feeling like that about old Len!"

"Will Len say, I wonder, when someone succumbs to you, 'Fancy anyone feeling like that about Honor!'"

"Yes, I expect so. Yes, that's just the sort of thing he would say."

"The blind, blind idiot!"

"Thank you, brother. You've an astonishing gift of making pretty compliments, haven't you?"

"None. I hate compliments. I speak only the dazzling truth."

"Oh, shut up! Here's the beloved greengrocer's, and there are the roots for Daddy and all of us to graze on to-night. Will you wait outside? Please do. I might get a giggling fit if I felt you were watching me."

"Yours to command," said Tony.

In such a fashion they spent the whole forenoon, Tony waiting outside shop doors and imagining with inner inflations that he was attending on his wife, and Honor (as he knew full well) extending the shopping, which ostensibly she so disliked, far beyond the plans which she had brought down the steps of her house. She would issue from the shops and push her parcels into the bag, or suspend them by the string loops over his fingers, and say, "This is magnificent. I never expected to have a brother like this." And when the Mall and the river, glimpsed at the top of Chiswick Lane, threatened them with severance, Tony demanded quickly :

"I say, couldn't we do something together this afternoon? The sun has entered my blood. Couldn't we go on the river?"

"I'm supposed to go calling with Mummy this afternoon."

"Can't you dodge it?"

"I suppose I could."

"Well, do. Could you be ready by two? Meet me at two in Chiswick churchyard, by Hogarth's tomb."

"Yes. Yes, I think I could, with a little management. Jill's is a sweet nature."

"Praise God for Jill!"

"Then for an hour or two, good-bye. And thank you a thousand times for holding all my parcels. I'm most terribly pleased with my new brother. I am—truly."

To this he answered with no clownish repartee, but with a flush and silence.

Ever since, the afternoon before, he had parted with Honor, there had been a pause in Tony's reasoning. He who in the church had been a vessel filling with pity and thought, was now a vessel charged with exultation only. And he would not suffer a footstep of thought to come near and disturb his exultation. God, no! Who, of his own will, would be healed of an opiate's ecstasy? The sun this day, with its July face, played on his skin a tingling warmth which was the exact physical accompaniment to the queer, white, shadowless excitement within. His reasoning stilled, he felt insubstantial as air. He was feelings, not thoughts. And Honor: he knew—simply

knew—that her thinking, too, had been dispersed into a mist of feeling. What might not happen on the river?

Here he was in the skiff with her, casting off from the boat-house at Strand-on-the-Green. What had happened between his good-bye two hours before and this reunion now he had little knowledge. He had changed into tennis flannels, cold though the April evening might turn; would he not willingly pay a price of pneumonia for the happiness of dazzling Honor with his white flannels? And Honor had changed her morning dress for a summery green frock and a large Leghorn hat—changed, undoubtedly, to feed his eyes. And now she lay at ease and at full length, on the sun-heated [stern-seat, and he quickly sculled the boat into slacker water under the bank, for the tide was running down at a good four miles an hour. He did not speak. He looked at the old tiled houses, with their green shutters and their dormer windows and their forward tilt which gave them the appearance of poising on their toes to pitch into the water, upper stories first. He looked at a pair of swans sailing near the mud. He passed under Kew Bridge; and beyond its spans the river broke beautiful: the tall trees of Brentford Eyot on one side and the tall trees of Kew Gardens on the other; and the water green with their reflections beneath the banks, and widely silver in the centre, where the strong tide ran.

“I shall kiss her here,” he thought.

It was Easter, and the young low trees on Brentford Eyot were yellow-green, but the tall old trees behind them, spreading their bare branches against the sky, looked like seaweed pressed against the blue page of an album. The whole stretch of the river was empty, as it always is in the youth of the year, this side Richmond Lock. And the towing path, running like a ribbon between the old grey wall of Kew Gardens and the willows bowing to the water, was empty too. And the stillness of the budding trees, the half-heard sibilance of the birds, and the rhythmic flutter of his feathering oars, confirmed his silence, and laid on her a silence of sympathy.

Once she turned and saw him gazing at her, and to deny her confusion she laughed and said:

“You haven’t spoken a word since Strand-on-the-Green.”

He spread his lips into a smile and lifted his brows.

“Why speak?” he asked.

And she turned again to her watching of the Kew bank where,

between lofty chestnuts, came glimpses of rhododendron in every shade of red. Under the spread of one tree sat a painter on his stool with his easel before him.

"The artists are out!" she ventured humorously.

But Tony did not answer.

The silence held them till they were round the bend of Syon Park, and here the river seemed wider, because the trees were everywhere lower, and the green reflections had withdrawn to the banks. The breadth of the river was silver now, and visited the narrow green reflections with patches of silky sheen.

"You aren't always so dull," said Honor at last; and Tony's eyes twinkled, as he offered something which he had searched out the night before.

"Can Honor's voice provoke the silent dust? . . ."

"If you begin the Honor quotations, I shall get out," she declared.

"Get out, my dear," Tony consented, turning the boat's head quietly towards mid-stream. "I'd love to see you."

"All right, *Saint* Antony. By the by, did you know that Saint Antony was the patron saint of pigs?"

"I didn't. How did you know?"

"I looked him up last night."

"Oh, did you? And haven't you discovered that there was another Antony, who was no saint?"

"What was he?"

"He was a lover."

"Mark Antony, you mean?"

"Yes. Wait. . . ." He ran over something in his memory, and then, fixing his gaze on Honor as she reclined on her cushion, spoke in a low voice, level and smooth as the water, and as lit with a peculiar light of its own:

"The barge she sat in, like a burnished throne,
Burned on the water. . . . For her own person,
It beggared all description: she did lie
In her pavilion, cloth-of-gold of tissue,
O'erpicturing that Venus where we see
The fancy outwork nature. . . .
O, rare for Antony! . . ."

He sighed with satisfaction. "Yes, rare indeed for Antony!"

"Is that something you've written?" asked Honor.

"No, sister. It's an earlier master's: Shakespeare's."

"Oh, I'm sorry. I ought to have known, I suppose."

"It's his description of the woman Antony loved—his Cleopatra."

This turned Honor's face away; but since Tony did not proffer an explanation, she was driven, by a strengthening impulse, to inquire why he had quoted it.

"Why? I should have thought that was obvious. Because you recalled it to me."

"But I'm not like Cleopatra, I hope. She was a brown hook-nosed creature, I'm sure."

"She was beautiful in her own kind, and whatever is beautiful must be like you."

"Don't be absurd."

"I will not be, and I have not been. You *know* you are beautiful of your kind—and so is the movement of this boat through the water, and the shudder of my oars, feathering the surface, and—and what else——?" he looked round for beauties comparable with Honor's—"and the darkness under those trees, and the sun on that lawn. When anything decides to be beautiful, it enters on its kinship with you."

"Ah, well," Honor sighed. "I suppose it's nice to have a poet for a brother."

"It's nice to have an inspiration for a sister."

"I don't know what you mean now. . . . But do let's stop. It's getting tedious."

"Well, there's Richmond Lock. I'll row you up there where there are plenty of pleasure boats and people to amuse you."

"No don't let's go there," murmured Honor. "Let's go back to where the river's empty."

Touched by her hint that she would rather be alone with him, he turned his bows without a word, and, hardly paddling, let the boat drift down the running stream. He would let the stream carry it down to that lovelier reach where he had first promised himself he would kiss Honor. And there he would keep his promise to himself. So agitating was the thought that he could speak no word, and a half hour passed in silence before they were in the empty stretch that flanks Kew Gardens wall. He cast his eyes around for a place where he could moor, and selected a patch of still water under the droop of a willow. They ducked as the nose of the boat poked into this cool shade, and Tony, unshipping his oars, knelt on the seat and looped the painter round a splintered bole. Then he returned to his

seat, and with a sigh bent his head and rounded his back to provide a dumb-show of exhaustion.

"Tired?" inquired Honor gently, from where she lay low in the stern.

For answer he went and sat in the stern-seat by her side, resting his arm along its back. She straightened her legs and crossed one foot over the other. Soon his arm had fallen to her shoulder, and since she did not resist him, he drew her a little closer. "I'm tired too," she said, as if justifying her consent; and she removed her hat into her lap, and let her head rest in his neck. And in gratitude for such a use of him, he tightened his grasp. They spoke nothing, but Honor stared at her crossed feet, and Tony stared at her gold-shot hair. Many minutes passed, and he wondered if she could feel the knocking of his heart. He hoped she could, and tried to place her so that it could tell its own story. And on a sudden, hardly aware of what he was doing, he had dropped his lips in a moth-soft visit to her hair.

She moved her head and looked up.

"Honor," he whispered into her eyes. "I love you."

The eyes folded for amusement.

"Tony, you *are* the most ridiculous person I've ever met. You know nothing about me."

"I know that I love you."

"Do you realize that it's only twenty-four hours since we first met?"

"Twenty-four seconds or twenty-four centuries are the same thing where Eternity is. To be in love is to be high above time. Time ended and Eternity began the minute I saw you in the church, before I had even seen your face. I have known you twenty-four centuries."

"You are talking a lot of nonsense."

"I wonder."

Her face was still upturned to hear and to rebuke his unintelligible words; and he dropped his lips in the moth-soft visit, not to her hair, but to her mouth. "That is to be in Eternity," he muttered, his speech quickened. "What has time to do with that?"

But she had averted her face.

"Don't, Tony. . . . Not like that."

And he, offended, armed himself in silence; whereon she looked up again and added:

"I want to like you, you see."

"Like! *Like!* I don't want you to *like* me. I don't like you. I don't know enough about you to like you, but I love you—O Honor, I love you—I've never known anything like this before—I've felt unreal, as if I had died and crossed into some other life—it's either love or madness. Tell me one thing, dear—I say! forget about being modest, and don't mind hurting me, if you have to—but tell me the honest truth, did you feel anything when you first saw me?"

Her face, rather frightened, was still staring at him, and she did not answer.

"Tell me, dear," he repeated.

Her lids closed over her eyes, and her smile broke into the words, "I admired you, I think."

"Oh, won't you have the courage to say more than that?"

"I admired you very much."

He hugged her tight now, and her body was willing.

"Did you think about me after you had gone? I know it's not generous to ask, but I don't care. I don't feel generous. *Did* you?"

"I thought about you a bit."

"All night?"

Again her eyes closed that they might play no part in the nodding of her head.

"Yes."

"O Honor. . . . Honor. . . ."

"I have told you the truth, Tony, but I don't know what it means."

Tony hardly spoke again that afternoon; but rowed her quietly home through the sunset and the dusk.

CHAPTER III

THE DAYS OF UNREASON

THAT evening after his kiss on the river, he paced up and down his room ; and in the riot of his thoughts, a faith in his love was the cause that carried all before it. An orator stood on a platform in his mind and fanned and fed the cause with rhetoric. "I believe in this. I believe in this. I love her. I love that child. And it is the real thing. It was too quick and unsought and overwhelming to be a delusion. And because it is the real thing it will last. I am going to enter upon this love and see that it lasts—always—always. There is going to be one love in my life and one only ; and it is going to be this. I am going to love her passionately all through our wedded life, and right up to the last. Oh, I know that others have hoped to do this and failed, but I'm going to be one of the few that do it. Most men have no wisdom or skill to tend their love and keep it aflame. If there's an art in these matters I'll discover it. It would be cowardly not to go forward just because so many have failed. I'm going on."

But in the morning an axe fell upon the neck of his elation, and nearly severed it. He met Honor and walked with her ; and he went home from the walk, darkened by the knowledge that, though her talk had been studiously merry, she had rebuffed him. It was so, was it not ? Examine again every word she had spoken and every detail of her manner. Could they be otherwise read ? No, she had firmly rebuffed him. *Hell !* what did it mean ?

He took the worrying question up to his room. Of course : she was angry with herself for having been too willing the previous afternoon ; she was going to play the conventional game of "not making herself too cheap ;" she was going to put him back in his place. Conventional little fool ! After

all, everything around her had always been conventional: her Anglo-Indian, churchwarden father; her churchmanship; her High School; her Chiswick home. Despite all her fine talk about the unadventurousness of her Chiswick life, she was going to be no heroine of love, who could scout conventions, as for an hour he had hoped she was going to be, after her heroic confession on the river.

He met her once or twice more, and was received with the same cheery discouragement, and sent home to the privacy of his room, declaiming angrily. Damn! he wasn't going to stand for this. Did she love him, or did she not? In eight or nine days he must return to Hurst, and she could play with him in this fashion! If she did love him, she must stop this fooling; if she did not, he would snap the rope that bound him to her—snap it then and there. Up and down the room, up and down the same track; or now seated for a space, and now standing by the window and looking out and seeing nothing; with his brain heated under his hair, and the skin of his temples and cheeks tingling with warmth.

He mumbled the sentences of a passionate and offensive letter he would write to her. And the literary artist in him, rejoicing in the full-charged phrases as they leapt ready-made into thought, bade urgently that he released them from their mere dream existence and gave them the active life of words that have taken shape on notepaper and gone beneath the eyes of their victim. And the lover in him—the lover that had hurt Wavers and struck at Doyly—was restless till they had administered their wound. He seized pen and wrote.

“Honor” (no dear or dearest),

“In a week from now I go back to Hurst. Whenever in the last few days I have met you, you have suppressed me if I spoke of anything except commonplace gossip or childish pleasantries. And in the presence of this rebuttal, my courtesy with you, which is the expression of a reverence deeper than any emotion that has come into my life before, has not suffered me to tell you of a love that is burning and searing my heart. I write it. And if you do not wish to read it, you can turn from the letter and put it away from you as you have so often turned from me and dried up the words on my lips. I don't know if you will read it, but I feel that I must write it if I am to know any mental rest.

“I have told you that I love you—the word ‘passionately’ I will

not use, for it has been cheapened below any use for me. I will simply say that I love you with the only love I shall ever give to anyone ; that I believe that it will last through life, only deepening and strengthening and refining itself, as it quiets from its early fervour ; that, if you will meet my love with your own, you will be for me the solution of all the riddles of life—you will be my fulfilment—the answer to the question, ‘ Why was I born ? ’ I write such words after weighing them and deciding that they add no single touch of meretricious ornament to the beauty of the simple truth.

“ In these words you will see that I have had no truck with ‘ expediency,’ or the fear of ‘ making myself cheap ’ ; nor have I ever, as so many lovers do, tried to heighten your interest by letting you doubt my love and awaking your jealousy. I have just told you the truth. And I want a similar frankness from you, and a similar superiority to the ordinary trickery. I love you much too painfully to be in any mood for the shallying treatment you may think it right or pretty to adopt. I am not going to be led at the end of any threads of caprice, nor whistled to at six o’clock and sent about my business at seven. Nor shall I accept the position of a useful and amusing second or third string to your bow. I must be all or nothing. And I feel I must know now which I am to be. I ask you to reply to this letter with a simple answer to my question, ‘ Do you love me ? ’ And if you say ‘ No,’ as you have every right to do, I shall trouble you no more.”

Doubting the wisdom of delivering this letter, but powerless to resist the drive in his imagination, he went out after dark, lips set and reasoning silenced, and pushed the envelope through the letter-box of the house on the Mall. The lid of the letter-box clapped down on a deed irretrievable.

That was on Monday night, and he must return to Sussex on the Tuesday of the following week. Next day he waited at windows for a glimpse of herself or her messenger, bringing her answer. His thoughts and his hands were impotent for other work. And the day passed with never the one letter that mattered tumbling to the doormat. Not the time to despair yet : she might have posted it ; the letter would be among those of the first post to-morrow. And there were two letters for Tony on his breakfast plate—ah ! one would be hers ! The top one came from Cyril Winter—curse him ! Then the under one might be hers. Dared he look ? No, it was from a Stratton Lye boy—oh, drat the child ! How little interest had any Stratton Lye boy for him now !

Still, there was another post at twelve; perhaps a local letter was more likely to come at that hour. For three hours after breakfast he fretted restlessly to and fro, often visiting the window in the hope that Honor might be in the road, and always seeing the same dull avenue of houses. Eleven-thirty. Only half an hour now. If it did not come by the noon post he would know his fate: she would have snubbed him and let him go. Did thirty minutes ever creep so slowly? Had twenty of them gone yet? No, only six. . . . What said the watch now? Only a quarter to twelve? . . . And now, after this wait deliberately prolonged? Ah, it was five to twelve. Forthwith that sinking and heightening of the heart, as one longed for and dreaded the postman's coming! His knock, higher up the street, quickening one's pulse-rate: his approach with nearer knocks; his knock next door; *now!*

Could he be passing across the front of their house instead of coming up their threshold? "Oh, he can't be, he can't be." But he was; he was turning into the gate of the house beyond.

"*My God!* All right! . . . Then it's over. . . . I know now. . . . It's all over. All right, Honor: you'll see no more of me. I shall not again offer myself. You don't know with whom you are dealing. And, O Honor, I loved you. And I'd have been good to you if you'd have taken me. Well, one can turn to one's books now. The suspense is over."

Read he could not; but he could write. Never had he felt so eager to write. He found relief in turning to the poem he had begun last term, *Regnauld and Mélisse*, and in altering the feature and the voice of Mélisse into the features and the voice of Honor. No use had he for the poem which had occupied the years before, wherein the two heroes were very like Frank Doyly and himself—how nonsensical now seemed that piled-up tale! The days passed over his new work. Each morning, the first post having failed to bring him the letter, he went up to his room, where his table was, and out of a settled sadness tapped the springs of creation.

Saturday morning showed on his plate a letter that might be hers. No expression passed over his face as he sat down before it; no lift of the brow or dart of the eye that Keatings and Derek and his mother might observe, though suspense was making his heart knock hammer-strokes and shaking the fingers that cut this envelope addressed in a girlish hand. The same fingers dropped sugar into his coffee as he began to read.

"My dear Tony

"Will you do something for me. You must!!! There's a too truly wonderful Fancy Dress Ball to-night at the Apollo Rooms Kensington, the Easter Ball, Jill and my cousin Gerard Harvey are going and I could have two more tickets for the asking but I have no brother to take me now that Len's gone. Will you take me. I have been wanting to ask you all the week but I haven't had the courage and you see, Len and Jill brought back from Italy some years ago a perfectly priceless set of *Commedia dell'Arte* dresses, an *Isabella* an *Arlecchino* a *Columbina* and a *Braggart Captain*, and Jill is going as the *Isabella* and I as the *Columbina* and Gerard wanted to go as the *Arlecchino* but I insisted that he was to be the *Braggart Captain* so that you could be the *Arlecchino*!!! You won't mind being a zany, will you. One reason why I insisted on you being *Arlecchino* is because I wanted to see a lot of you before you go back to your beastly old school, and *Arlecchino* always plays opposite *Columbina* as of course you know being so learned!! I got *Columbina's* dress out of our property basket this afternoon, and oh Tony it was so thrilling that it simply gave me courage to ask you. And now I am going to melt your heart by being terribly pathetic!! Tony I have hung up both garments that the smell of camphor may evaporate. Don't make me have to put them back in the basket tonight unworn and wet with my tears. Don't you go back on Tuesday. How bestial. Do let us have this spasm of gaiety before you go.

"My love,

"Honor."

Tony read it again; not knowing whether it was weighing him down with disappointment and resentment or inflating him with tenderness and joy. Not a word of answer to his late appeal, nor allusion to it, even! To treat it as a piece of foolishness best forgotten! By heaven, he wouldn't stand that! It was another of her cheery rebuffs, and he was finished with them. To write in this merry, care-free style when he was living daily with anguish! To treat as nonsensical his assurance that, unless he could be all-in-all to her, he must go out of her life for ever! What a lesson for her if he, in his turn, left her letter unanswered! Or, better still, if, too lofty to stoop to a tit-for-tat, he sent her a courteous answer, declining her invitation.

But "Will you take me?" These little words went straight as a shaft to his protectiveness. "Will you take me?" What

a meaning might be hidden behind them! And: "I insisted on you being Arlecchino." This deliberate choice of him as her partner! And at the end of it all: "My love." What did those two words mean, left in the air like that? He had asked her: "Do you love me?" and she had replied: "My love. Honor."

He took the letter upstairs to pore over it in solitude. "Will you take me?" "O Honor darling, how can I turn my back on that? But am I then to eat the snub you gave me when you refused to answer my letter? And after all I said, am I to let you think that you have but to whistle and I shall come to your heel?"—the orator had mounted the platform in his mind again—"No, you had best take the wound and understand me. No, my dear, I don't take rebuffs so easily. I do not come a second time."

This last sentence drove him straight to his table and his notepaper.

"My dear Honor,

"I am sorry I cannot accompany you to the dance you mention, but I shall be busy to-night making preparations for my return to Sussex——"

But Honor reading that! The hot tears welling to her eyes! Oh, no, no. One must forgive, that was all, rather than administer such a disappointment as that. He would cheapen himself once more. And perhaps, perhaps, she might answer his question to-night. Honor, in her Columbina's dress, might give him his "Yes," and languish in his arms. "I will come again once more," the orator declaimed for him, and stepped down from the platform. †

And he took his pen and wrote: "Why, Honor dear, of course I will take you to the dance. Look for me this afternoon. . . ."

And there he stopped. Yes, no more than that. That much was good. And it should be delivered quickly that she might have time to reflect on its reticence. She would see in it both dignity and mystery, and be left wondering.

The Ball was in full swirl when Jill and Honor Daubeny, and Gerard Harvey and Tony added an Isabella and a Columbina,

a Braggart Captain and an Arlecchino to the fringe of the scene. Honor's dress was anything but the Columbine of the harlequinade: it was a voluminous creation of red and gold brocade, with a tight waist that lifted up her breasts and showed above the low bodice a little of the fold between them—to the final rout of Tony; Jill's was of the same pattern, but in white and gold; Tony's was a striped jerkin, and hose and pointed hat; and Gerard Harvey's Braggart Captain was more like a swashbuckling Toby Belch than anything else. Gerard Harvey had proved a man much older than Tony had foreseen, and all agreed that he was the chaperon of the party. The four stood by the door, and spent a few minutes in recognizing the costumes of the crowded dancers eddying beneath the great chandeliers.

All those guests who revisit the earth when a Costume Ball calls them to a night of life again were there: Queen Elizabeth and Mary Tudor, Nero and Marie Antoinette, Prince Charlie and Dick Turpin and Lady Jane Grey—so many of those, as Tony pointed out, who had died violently and sought new life in a Costume Ball! And the figments were as alive to-night as the dead men: The Queen of Hearts, Don Quixote, the Vicar of Wakefield, Ophelia and Hamlet and Carmen. And all the nations, such is their courtesy on these occasions, had sent their usual delegates: a Dutch Girl, a Mandarin, a Geisha or two, a Matador, two Cossacks, and Uncle Sam himself. And those of the Immortals too, who love the dancing time of men, were mixing in the revel: a scarlet Mephistopheles and a black devil, a Puck and an Ariel and a Pan. And our brothers, the animals—yea, and the flowers as well—jostled with the rest to prove how kin they are to men and immortals, when all are dancing. Little wonder that the Braggart Captain, infected by such festivity, seized Isabella round the waist and disappeared; and Tony, with never so much as a by-your-leave, spirited off with Columbina.

Having bumped into Satan and apologized to Puck, he thought it worth while to remark to Honor that none but the wicked or mischievous Immortals ever fraternized with men on their gala nights. Where were the Watchers and the Holy Ones? And this led him into metaphysical profundities, whereby he struggled to explain to Honor that all opposites were equally true, that man was at once a solitary and a herder, and that St. Antony was the truth of his solitariness and Puck and Dionysus the truth of his good company. And for this lapse he apologized.

Honor looked up into his face. "What a strange mind you've got, Tony!" she said. "It doesn't seem to work like anyone else's."

"How so?"

"Oh, I've noticed it again and again. You so often seem less excited by the things themselves than by the strange ideas you can find behind them. I'm afraid *my* brain can only move among the things themselves."

It was a pleasant rebuke and he acknowledged it with a pleased smile.

"Probably the ideas behind are much more real, and therefore much more exciting, than the things in front."

"There you go again! It'll take me all the evening to find out what you meant by that. And I shall take it to bed and keep awake with it. It's a strain sometimes, Tony."

He danced on, probing for a special meaning in these last words.

"Have I often been a strain on you, dear?"

"Oh, no. Once or twice."

"When was the last time?"

She looked up, both pardon and a plea for pardon in her eyes.

"You know when, don't you?"

And his hand behind her waist drew her nearer for a second's fraction. She had alluded to his letter; almost she had asked pardon for not answering it. "She will speak to-night," he thought. "She will make an opportunity to say, Yes, she loves me with a completeness no less than mine. But I shall give her no prompting. She must come of her own."

"Don't let's talk any more now," he said. "Let's dance and dance."

"Oh, yes. I like just to float on the music—" and she began to hum:

"Waltz me around again, Tony,
Around, around, around;
Waltz me around again, Tony,
Don't let my feet touch the ground,
It's lovely and dreamy,
It's peaches and creamy,
And I forget what comes next, don't you?"

"Hush!" he murmured. And they danced in silence till the music ceased.

He partnered Jill in the next dance, while Gerard Harvey guided Honor in and out of sight, through the jostling crowd. Often, as he talked to Jill, his eyes were seeking Honor, and once—twice they found her face and earned her lively smile. It was some time before he discovered that he was dancing more fluently than ever in his life, and that this was both because the taller and slender Jill fitted his height, and because she was the lightest dancer who ever flattered a partner into believing himself better than he was.

"Confound it!" he said. "Is it I who am dancing so perfectly or is it you?"

"You are dancing very nicely."

He looked down into her face—the oval version of Honor's face. Well, if he could not now talk *to* Honor, he could talk *about* her to this sister of hers—what did he care if Jill espied his infatuation? Besides, was there not a peculiar kindness and understanding in Jill's eyes, when sometimes he trapped them watching him?

"Jill, don't you think Honor looks lovely to-night?"

"Yes, I think she looks adorable."

"What a generous sister you are! But there! You can afford to be generous."

Jill laughed the compliment away. "Generous or jealous: I wonder which."

"Ah now!" Tony rebuked her. "That won't do. You're well aware that you've no reason to be jealous. Besides, you're exactly like Honor, only in a different shape. I always think you're like two dishes out of the same dinner service—one round and one oval."

"Enough! Enough!" laughed Jill. "But the fact remains I've always wanted to be small and round-headed like Honor."

"Well, that's very silly of you," said Tony.

"Look at Honor's shoulders," Jill advised.

"I have. I always am," Tony admitted.

"Well, then," said Jill, as if the case were proved.

"Do you two sisters really admire and like each other so?" asked Tony. "That's rather wonderful, isn't it?"

"It's always been the fashion in our family to admire Honor. She's the family babe, and all that."

"I'm in the family now, dammy," Tony reminded her.

"Yes . . . But Tony, if that's so, you must try and understand—us."

"What do you mean?"

"Well, Honor, for example. You must understand that she's awfully young and simple, really—not dazzlingly clever. But *absolutely truthfully*, she's the sweetest and merriest and lovingest child imaginable."

How much did this adorable sister know?

"And you? What about you?" he asked.

"Oh, I expect I'm much about the same."

At the close of that dance they went to the chairs under the stage where Honor and Gerard were sitting. Honor, flushed and excited, greeted them with: "Oh, isn't it too unbearably lovely?" Jill collapsed merrily into a chair.

"Jill's expiring, and so am I," Honor declared. "I'm off to get lemon squashes."

"You're not!" Tony forbade. "I will go."

"No, you shan't, you harlequin!"

And Honor jumped up, but before she could escape, Tony had caught her hand as one might catch a bird in one's fist, and closed his fingers on it painfully.

"We'll both go."

"Let me go, you zany!"

"Certainly. Come on."

He drew her, running and sliding with him, across the empty floor; and a hundred pairs of eyes from the costumed figures and the chaperons along the walls turned in pursuit of their linked flight. A fan or two, and some monocles and lorgnons, followed them. Honor gave a skip.

"We make a nice little pair," she said. "Everybody's saying it, I can see."

"Mine is a reflected light."

"No, it isn't. You look quite nice in trunks and hose. And so do I in these voluminous folds. Only I wish I had tights like you."

"Honor, Honor!"

And then, to shrieks of alarm and laughter, the lights began to dim, and from the lime-lights high up in four corners of the room coloured beams played on the centre of the floor. The violins sang a waltz very softly, and the atmosphere of the Easter Ball changed from that of a scherzo into a nocturne. Into the darkness outside the dancing splashes of lights, and often across their white shafts, Tony waltzed with Honor; and neither spoke. From the darkness and the

pale-hued lights and the soft caressing music, sentiment saturated into them, as the electricians and the musicians designed it should. The worst of their bumps into laughing neighbours could not destroy this sentiment nor disturb their silence. They danced on and on, so restfully that time meant nothing. Tony felt Honor lean towards him, and he thought, "O Honor, you love me to-night as much as I love you. You will tell me so before the night is over. Perhaps you are wondering now how you can say it." And when the music ceased after the second encore, and all the couples withdrew to the walls, he kept her waltzing in the darkness for a few seconds more.

But as he was dwindling to a pause it happened that two of the lime-lights went out in the expectation that the chandeliers would immediately go up. Two were left playing. One had a dazzle-pattern glass before it, so that it laid a splash of many-coloured fragments on the floor; and the other had an open light, so that it threw a white ellipse by the side of the fragments. Tony saw his opportunity for a very fine parable, and was not the man to miss it.

"Behold the ruins of poor Arlecchino! He lies in a thousand lovely fragments on the floor. The white light is Columbine, perfectly intact! Ah!"—the dazzle glass had been removed—"all that was Arlecchino is gone now and forgotten like something that has never been."

"Zany!" Honor scoffed.

Never are the hours so quickly kidnapped as behind the backs of dancers, and the large hand of the clock on the gallery had already crossed the hour of midnight when Tony, who had been dancing with Honor half the night and telling himself that he could feel her love pouring over him, saw the lateness of the hour with a chill of fear. "Oh, surely she will speak to-night," he thought, and unwittingly drew her closer in invitation. O little Honor, you cannot be going to send me away unanswered. Is it an opportunity you want?"

His feet slowed and ceased.

"Oh, don't stop," she begged. "I don't want to stop." And the words hurt him. Had she no such thought as was filling him, of escaping together to a quiet place?

"Honor, let's find somewhere to sit this out?"

"Oh, must we?"

"No."

Sharply disappointed, he seized her and resumed the broken dance. Though she said nothing, he knew that she had observed his manner; and a few minutes later, she, in her turn, disengaged herself and stopped.

"Yes, let's sit this out somewhere. I'm really quite tired."

So they strolled out of the doors under the gallery, she slipping an arm into his, and he in acknowledgment pressing it against his side with his elbow. The corridor was as public as the ball-room, so numerous were the couples seated on the plush settees, and so inquisitive the gaze they directed to these passers-by. Through one glass door after another Tony peeped, but all the rooms had their occupants, and he sighed.

"Is there never a quiet place anywhere?"

The doors at the end of the passage opened on to the landing above the wide staircase.

"Let's go down," he proposed. "I don't care what I arrive at so long as I escape from these beastly crowds."

Honor was ready; indeed she put her further hand over the one she had linked on to his arm, and, thus bound to him, she footed it down the thick carpet. His hopes had soared into certainties now: he was walking to the incredible moment when she would say: "Tony, yes . . ." and they would seal it with a passionate kiss.

The wide staircase debouched on to the large first landing. Facing the staircase-floor were large doors evidently leading to an empty room, for no light showed through their stained-glass panes. He pushed open one, and by the invading light of the arc lamps in the street saw the outline of graceful French settees and sofas in gilded wood and brocade.

"This is a retreat, if you like. We have a whole drawing-room to ourselves."

She entered without demur, letting the door swing behind her.

"We won't put on the lights," added he, "lest anyone discovers this place of our privilege. Come; sit down by me."

Leading her to the nearest of the settees and seating her beside him, he put his arm round her shoulder and with his other hand gently caressed her cheek, her chin, and her throat. She dropped her head on his shoulder. Not for a long time did he do more than touch her face or turn it up to his and look down into her eyes, whose brilliance was just visible in the blue-grey darkness of the room. Then he began to imprint quiet

kisses on her forehead, and she suffered it. Quick little sentences shaped themselves unsought in his mind: "It is done. . . . We are there. . . ." And in one of these times when he was holding up her chin that he might see her eyes—at last, as if he could hold no longer his gathering ecstasy of anticipation, he passed his arm right round her shoulder, drew her up to him, and placed his lips down on hers. His hold became an inescapable lock, and the touch of his lips a hardening pressure.

She twisted her face from him, and her body pulled to be free. "Don't, Tony!"

At once he unclosed his hold a little that she might droop away from him, and asked: "'Don't.' Why 'Don't'?"

"You've no right to kiss me like that."

"No right!" On a sudden one hand fell limply to his side, and the other drew away from behind her. "What do you mean by 'no right'? I love you more than words can show, and that is the only way I can express it."

"Oh, I don't know, Tony." She put her hands together and dropped them between her knees. "It may be right for you to offer kisses like that if you love me as you say you do, but is it right for me to take them if I don't love you in quite the same way?"

Ten seconds of silence, and he stood up; stood dubious; and then walked towards the door.

"Come. We must go back."

"O Tony, what's the matter? What have I said?"

He only opened the door and let the light from the landing spread its fan into the room. "You'd better come away quickly. There's only half an hour more. I'm sorry I made a mistake just now."

"Tony, you wouldn't have me tell you untruths, would you? I'm awfully fond of you, but——"

"Please . . . please . . ." begged Tony, with suffering in his voice.

By the fan of light he saw that she had dropped her face into the palms of her hands. But he only walked on to the landing, waiting for her to come. Many fine denunciations and sarcasms came near his lips, but the fullness of his despair saved him from uttering them. And they danced a disorderly ballet in his head. "You hang about me as if you loved me, you let me touch your face and kiss your brow, you raise my hopes to the highest pitch, only to dash them to the ground again."

If you mean nothing with me, for God's sake let me alone. Let me go my way. I want no pretty letters from you. . . . I've told you I will not be half-and-half. Hell! I love you with all my being, but I'll not flirt with you, or be flirted with. . . . Gosh, she's nothing! She's too light to be capable of love—and I love her!"

With a tired toss of her head Honor joined him, and the two wordless children passed into the light of the stairs. And the light recreated their pantomime dresses, which the darkness had extinguished. Tony, inwardly laughing a bitter laugh at his merry-andrew dress, led the way up the stairs; and Honor, who had come down them on his arm, now followed one step behind.

As they approached along the corridor to the ballroom, they heard laughter and screams and wilder music than ever; and the picture framed by the arched entrance showed that the dancers were in paper caps and toy masks and false noses, to celebrate the last dances; that each had a "face duster" made of a hundred coloured strips of paper, or a "tittler" made of a peacock's feather, or a toy balloon; and that some were blowing toy trumpets and hooters, and that others were tossing long streamers of paper which entangled themselves round necks and feet, and over the high chandeliers. Yonder were Gerard and Jill, as uproarious as any, and buffooning with the best. Honor hesitated diffidently on the brink of this wild circle, and Tony stared into it. But he could not bear that she should loiter unpartnered outside the rioters. Nor must people look at her and wonder at her wistfulness.

"Come; we had best dance," he said.

And without an answer she came into his arms, and they danced into the midst of the rioters. One more pair of tinsel-jesters, coupled for a moment, under the transient light.

CHAPTER IV

THE OTHER FAMILY

TONY'S body returned to Hurst, and laughed a greeting to boys and colleagues in the hall of Stratton Lye, and climbed the stairs to the bedroom under the roof ; and all the while his mind was away in an empty nowhere and engaged with his thoughts of Honor. It had been a long debate between his thoughts—almost a business meeting ; and he had presided over it with a gloomy impartiality. And now his body sat on the bed, and his mind, before leaving the distant meeting, summed up its verdict : “ She does not love me ; that is plain. She likes me, and I might be able to make her do a little more, but that is not what I want. Good then ; I pursue her no more.”

And this resolution being a point at which he could well dismiss the meeting, he got wearily off the bed, took out his keys, and began to unpack. But, as often happens with a meeting when its chairman has dismissed it, its members did not adjourn ; and soon he was sitting on the bed with rounded shoulders and presiding over them again.

“ Failure ! I have failed with Honor. But it doesn't mean that I'm going to fail with everything else. I'm going to make a success of my writing. I *feel* it.” The irrepressible confidence of youth surged up. “ I feel *absolutely* confident about that. Much of it is great stuff, I know. And it'll be greater for all I've gone through in the last week. So good-bye, Honor. I'll get to work at once.” And he dismissed the meeting again.

And in the following weeks nothing but his writing could lift him out of the blackest despairs. He tried to tell himself that these despairs were largely a black miasma arising from auto-suggestion, but the information helped little ; he would sit on his bed, elbows resting on his knees, and picture Honor in the possession of another man and giving him all her love,

and then he would understand why some lovers had become murderers, or had let their whole lives tumble to waste. The weeks passed, and she did not write to him, nor he to her; and sometimes when the pain had got a deadening clutch on him, he would throw all fine resolutions to the wind, and think: "I can't go on with this. I can't. If she were to write one word of encouragement to me, I should have to skulk back to her. I've only enough strength left not to take the first step myself."

She wrote to him when July broke in a blaze of dog-days.

"Tony dear——"

The arrangement of the words was his first sharp prick of hope.

"—We've such an absolutely gorgeous plan Jill and I and we'll never forgive you if you don't fall in with it!!! You know Joyce was always raving to us about the happy times you used to have at Freshwater when you were children well we've been able to rent the very cottage that used to be yours, and the question is are you coming to stay with us directly your holiday begins and to stop just as long as you like. And the answer is Yes you are!! you will be able to show us all round and introduce us to the natives and besides, now that the desire has got firmly fixed in our heads, Jill and I, we shall suffer horribly if we don't get it. So you simply must because we suffer when we are thwarted, it's all Daddy's fault, he was so soft with us when we were young. Jill you know is awfully fond of you, she won't bear a word against you, not that anyone ever bears anything against you but she has announced that she wouldn't if she did. But let me have a little credit too, this enormously brainy idea originated with me. I just whispered it beneath my breath one day, and she replied quite calmly, Oh that's settled, and Daddy said, Is it to be sure, and she said, Yes to be sure it was, and didn't pursue a subject that was closed. So you see this is not so much an invitation as information. It's Jill's orders. And mine qui t'aime."

In the tumult of pleasure that was Tony's thinking just then a score of different delights was jostling in humorous horse-play: one wanted to kiss the letter and murmur: "You exquisite darling! I love every word that you write as I love every movement of your lips," or a like extravagance; another wanted to flourish the letter overhead and cry: "If I'm beaten, so are you, little one! 'The idea originated with me.'

Why did you tell me that? 'It's Jill's orders. And mine, *qui t'aime*.' Your latest version of 'My love. Honor.'" He rushed to his paper and wrote an enthusiastic reply, sending to Jill "his unlimited love;" for, in truth, he was feeling a love for that very dear girl—that strong, full, expansive love which a man can only feel for the woman he is not in love with.

So a happy noon in late July saw his face at the window of a train that was screaming through the New Forest to Lymington; but his eyes hardly saw the noon, for he was thinking of those old days when he and Peggy and Derek and Joyce, their heads full of "The Children of the New Forest" or "Tales of the Norman Kings," would crowd to the window to look out on these old trees in the hope that, down one of the long vistas, they might see the House of Arrowood, or the Intendant's cottage, or the tree from which the arrow glanced that slew the Red King, or some of the deer that the King loved as if he had been their father.

The sun had lit the Solent to a sherry gold when his little ship chunked out to it from the mud-flats of the mainland; and he stood in the head-wind to stare at the island, of which almost the whole outline was visible. On that little strip of land floating in the haze, was Honor now; waiting in one of the hollows under the hills, impatient and nervous, surely. A word kept framing itself on his lips: "Powerless. . . . Powerless when *this* calls. . . . I always have been;" and he rejoiced in his powerlessness. Would those hills which must have looked down on a million roaming lovers in their time watch yet another embrace? Rich, elating, breath-taking thought! . . . The church and houses of Yarmouth Town took larger and squarer shapes, and its long, white pier, if you half closed your eyes, seemed to breast up towards the ship and grow larger as it came. There were people waving on its edge, and surely one of them was Honor! Was it? Yes, it was. Honor alone—what a sister was Jill!—Honor in a white dress and a large straw hat.

As he stepped with grins and other comic grimaces on to the pier, they shook hands, and both were about to speak, when speech most treacherously deserted them. It pretended to be there for half a second, and then deserted them both at the same moment, and left them in their discomposure. They looked round for it, but it was not in sight. Tony summoned it to return,

and it returned unwillingly, bringing a very commonplace face indeed. They walked down the pier, and it lingered and halted between them, and once they thought it had slipped away again. Honor couldn't discipline it at all and would have let it escape if it liked, but Tony forced it to walk sensibly between them. In the hired car which waited at the pier's foot, it sat itself between them, as dull and perfunctory as if it disliked the rôle of separating chaperon. And both of them at last, after being polite with it, began to look away from so dull a companion. Tony took his pleasure in awaiting the landmarks on the familiar road. At intervals the chaperon, bound in duty to break a too long silence, explained what Tony was doing ; but it failed to break one interminable silence, and Tony, looking round towards Honor, perceived that it had finally escaped from the car. He put out his hand in search of hers, and she allowed hers to be found straying about, and to sit in his for all the rest of the journey ; so there was no longer a seat for speech between them.

In the cottage, General Daubeny rose from his chair and welcomed them, as he was compelled to do, for the front door opened straight into the living-room where he was smoking. He was a spare man of moderate height, with that skin which India first browns and then etches with the record of her suns. His spruceness was a soldier's : even on holiday, his grey shepherd's plaid trousers were sharply creased, his black jacket was as speckless as a uniform's tunic, his collar was of regulation pattern, white and starched, and his bow-tie was rigid. The neat, grey moustache was in review order, each bristle of it facing the right way and ready, as it were, for a king's inspection. The eyebrows were less orderly ; they might have been likened to two groups of civilians craning their necks to watch the review on the Indian plain. The eyes themselves could stare piercingly ahead and around, but anyone knew that they were seeing no more than a soldier sees ; and when they were not engaged on this sharp scrutiny, they were simple and humorous and kind. The inevitable monocle went easily to his eyes ; and, in fine, he was as perfectly typical a product of his calling as any you could find in the Yacht Club on the Bund at Bombay or in the United Services Club on Pall Mall.

Tony, was always diverted by the way the General's manner would stay smooth and humorous and loquacious, till some unordinary remark, or a knock at the door, surprised

him, when his head would swing with a bird-like quickness to the interruption, and some such exclamations as: "What-what? Be damned! Good God!" would spring from his lips, and his hand would lift his monocle to its "stand to!" in his eye, and his eyes would stare like machine guns at whatever was toward. Watching this little series of reflex actions, Tony always built around him his Indian Orderly Room, and saw his Adjutant entering to inform him of a misdemeanour in the Lines, or, worse still, of the imminent approach of the Divisional General. Jill called it "Daddy's Stand to;" Honor, loving the whole series, nicknamed her father, "What-what-damn-damn;" and Len, using the residue of his expressions, called his governor "Good God."

General Daubeney had liked from the first "that Irish boy," as he described Tony; and now he showed a real pleasure in his arrival.

"Here you are at last! She's brought you safely, has she? Did you have a pleasant journey? I meant to come and meet you myself, but Jill issued different routine orders. You'd better understand at once that Jill's the C.O. here, and I'm her Orderly Sergeant, or her sweeper, or something. It was she who detailed Honor to meet you. I do hope these two girls won't be too much of a nuisance to you. They seem to want to monopolize you, but don't hesitate to give them the slip when they bore you, and we might have a round of golf together. . . . Honor, go and find your mother. . . . The Memsahib's about somewhere, O'Grogan, and she'll be in in a minute. Sit down, sit down. Honor, go and find your mother——"

But at that moment Jill entered the room with such a burst that her father exclaimed: "What-what?" and Honor added, "Damn-damn!" while his hand fumbled for the monocle.

"Tony!" cried Jill. "This is ripping. So here you are, and did you have a pleasant journey?—oh, what a pair of stupid, uninspired remarks!"

"Be damned, they're not!" the General interrupted. "They're not stupid at all. I made them myself just now."

"How did you leave England?" Jill tried instead. "*That's* more original."

"Very empty," said Tony gallantly.

The General laughed. "England indeed! The Isle of.

Wight isn't a foreign part. 'How did you leave England?' Good God, what will the girl say next?"

Then came Mrs. Daubeny, with a welcome no less generous, and an invitation that he came and saw his room. "Though you must know your way about better than we do," she smiled.

"Why, why?" the General inquired, his monocle on sentry duty and challenging this passing remark.

Honor explained.

"Because he used to live here himself, ducky. Hasn't that soaked in yet?"

The monocle challenged this new statement, and accepted it for a friend.

"Oh, of course, of course. . . . Well, let the boy have a rest. Get him some tea. I don't suppose he's had any tiffin yet."

"Don't be absurd, father," Jill broke in. "He'll be much more interested in seeing his old home than in chatting to you."

The monocle swung round to this third voice, and was satisfied with its good faith.

"Oh, yes, I suppose so. . . . Well, I'd better show him the rounds. . . . Oh, no, he knows his way round, as you say. Carry him off, then."

And he sank back into his chair, letting the monocle fall.

Over the tea-cups Tony perceived an interesting battle, though it was veiled by the good manners of all. There were two topics of conversation skirmishing for the capture of the meal, the General's heavy battalions and the daughters' light cavalry. The General was evidently fearful lest the light chatter of his children should bore his guest, and the children held similar views about their father's long arguments and anecdotes. The General talked of India, and described the voyage of Len and Joyce thither, lecturing reminiscently on Gib., Malta, Port Said, Port Tewfik and Aden; and his daughters, at every opportunity, attacked on his flank with their plans for the morrow, the colour of their bathing dresses, and the prawns at low tide. Tony divided his attention as evenly as possible between the combatants, strangely moved to perceive the loving shame with which each generation regarded the conversational talents of the other. But the huge reserves of the General were too many for his daughters, and his battalions began to march forward unendingly, while Jill and Honor were

reduced to a guerilla warfare on his rear. Finally they were left behind in a great silent desert, and the Indian Army marched off with Tony.

The girls waited in their chairs, sighed once or twice, and at length quitted the room with their mother.

The General seemed highly pleased. One feels an especial affection for a boy one has rescued, and he offered Tony a cheroot and arranged both of themselves into chairs, for the enjoyment of a masculine conversation. He discussed the position of the British in India. He explained the quarrel between Lord Kitchener and Lord Curzon, and the damnableness of the *Bombay Chronicle* and Mrs. Annie Besant, and the necessity for the Strong Hand. He enumerated all those politicals whom he wouldn't trust an inch further than he could see them. He spoke of the machinations of the Germans, and the meaning of their friendship with the Turks and their Bagdad Railway, and the chances of a Jihad among the Moslems. He described punitive expeditions against the frontier tribes, and his experiences in China during the Boxer Rebellion. He told amusing stories of Babu clerks, laughed heartily at them, and yielded to the temptation which attacks us all, to recite the really laughable climax a second time. And all of this Tony answered and parried with admirably feigned interest, longing all the while to be off into the summer evening with Honor and Jill, and listening with his other ear for the sound of their voices or their footsteps.

At last, thinking that if he could not be with them, he would at least savour the pleasure of talking about them, he sent the General's conversation divagating towards his daughters, and heard how Jill (the *burra wallah*) was one of the world's beautiful natures, but it was Honor (the *shota wallah*) who had fascinated her father ever since her sparkling and impudent childhood. This flowed naturally into a chapter on life in Rawal Pindi and an appreciation of the loyalty of Indian ayahs to their charges, and a character study of a certain Subadar Major of the regiment towards the close of which Tony's other ear began to suspect the slither of furtive movements in the garden outside. He said, "Really?" and "Good Gracious!" and "Ha, ha!" when they fitted into the discourse, and decided that the movements were accompanied by suppressed giggles and were situated to the left of the lattice window. Or were they even closer? Were they not under the sill and disturbing the

sunflowers and the faded foxgloves that peeped in through the panes?

As he wondered, the two faces of Jill and Honor, the oval face a little higher than the round one, framed themselves in the flowers and the creepers all round the casement, and Honor called out: "Good God! Damn, damn!" and Jill pleaded, "I say, Daddy: let him go now. He's come to see *us*, not you."

"What, what!" exclaimed the General. "Be damned, what?" and up went his monocle to examine the visitation.

"Good God!" he said.

In the morning Honor and Jill bore him off before the General could suggest a round of golf, and together they went down to the beach and inquired amongst the boats and the bathing machines after Andrews, the blond and genial fisherman, and old Munster, the dark and surly one, who, according to legend, had poisoned his wife. Andrews was still active, this very hour, and was out paddling with his boat among the lobster-pots, but Munster had long ago gone gloomily to his account and the reproaches of his murdered wife.

They lay on the beach till the sea went down, and then clambered over the rocks to the Western caves, and lo! Tony was almost too tall now to crouch his way through the Emergency Exit. The Frenchman's Hole was still there, a dark and forbidding shaft in the Western Wall. And walking back to lunch, Honor broke a pause with: "I like living in your childhood;" for which most gratifying word, Tony took her hand and pressed it.

And in the afternoon they dodged the General's invitation to Tony "to come and stretch his legs with him in a long walk, having done his duty by those two girls;" and instead Tony stretched the girls' legs and his own along Tennyson's Lane, and up the downs to the Monument, and there dared them to roll down the slopes as Joyce and Peggy were always ready to do. But neither accepted the challenge, so all three linked arms and ran down till the strain on their coupling was too great, and they broke up in laughter, and Honor went shrieking on towards the grass road at the bottom, and Jill, as was fitting in one of her name, fell down, and Tony, leaving her to her wounds in blackguardly fashion, raced after Honor and beat her by a dozen lengths. Then along the turf road to Alum Bay,

where an alfresco tea, if memory were no liar, could be drunk beneath its rainbow cliffs.

On the downs between Compton Farm and Freshwater there is a rolling summit from which the country falls away in billow upon billow of pasture and tillage; and here, as you halt in your homeward walk, with the falling sun in your faces, you can view the sea on both sides of you, and know that you are on an island. Yonder, to the north, the River Yar meanders under the yoke of Yar Toll Bridge to the Solent, which glistens in a placid ribbon, with the hills of the mainland rising blue behind it; here, under Freshwater cliffs, the Channel plays in the same light, and Highdown cliff thrusts into it a towering corner, like a ship's bows, with a little rock at its foot.

And not once nor twice, in the next few days, but evening after evening—so it were fine—did these three top that summit at its best hour; for you can cross it returning from Compton Farm, after a visit to learn if teas, with blackberry jam and cream, are still sold there at ninepence a head; or from Brook where you have gone to examine the stone forest under the sea and to ascertain how much may be left of that old wreck among whose bones you once played hide-and-seek; or you can reach it if you have stolen from among the General's golf clubs each of you one, and have taken them up on to the high, free turf above the links, where there are none to laugh at you, and where Jill, who can really play this difficult and dangerous game, has given you a lesson and many rebukes for your screams and your tomfoolery and your military oaths.

That day they reached this summit on their return from Brook, they were very weary in loin and limb, so they stood there awhile that their disordered breathing might slacken to the standard rate again. To aid this recovery Tony put an arm round each of their waists, and Jill looked away over the two seas, and Honor pillowed her head in his neck, announcing that her purpose was sleep. Tony was just thinking that this was hardly the best way for her to steady his disordered breathing; he was telling himself that he loved Jill and Honor both, and ought to be allowed to marry two sisters, if he wanted to; and, more seriously, he was promising himself that this

quiet pause up here would be listed among the fine things in his memory, when Honor abandoned her plan of sleep, because the pillow, she said, was bony; which indictment drew "'Sdeath!" and "'Sblood!" from Tony, and started a long controversy as to its truth.

That second time they reached it, on their return from Compton Farm, Honor and he were alone, for Jill had declared that she must give her adorable father one good game of golf, or he would not be as happy as he deserved to be; so here in the evening light came only two people, pushing their spiked walking-sticks into the turf; and the evening light was empty, because they had dawdled in the yard of the farmhouse and among the gorse bushes, and along the brinks of the cliff, so that it was later than usual when they reached the highest place and looked at the two seas.

"*Sapristi!*" Tony exclaimed. "What a light!"

Their lifted eyes had noticed, as they climbed to a view of the sun's face, that one vast pattern of tiny clouds was spread across the sky, from horizon to horizon, in the shape of an angel's wing; and now, with a gasp, they saw that it was more like a wing than scoffers would ever credit, for it tapered in long streamers to a point behind the Solent. The sun was down below the opposite hills, leaving all the wing's plumage tipped with rose. Gold lay the Solent's strip; and square as a doll's toys stood the coastwise buildings of the mainland. Some of their windows which could still see the sun were flashing this message in gleams of light. There was a moving in the quiet air, and note of trouble in the beating of the sea, though a schooner, many miles out, seemed as still as a model in an old mariner's room. The movement in the air was stealthy, and one had the strange idea that the mist which had already erased the horizon could be felt on the cheek which was turned towards it. From some red-jacketed golfers down on the links came their voices in a mountain clearness; they had long ago abandoned their game in this impossible light and were calling: "Who goes home?"

Tony examined the sky with his mouth open.

"Mackerel skies and mare's tails
Make lofty ships carry low sails,"

he quoted. "The weather'll be all wrong to-morrow."

Honor placed her hands on the crook of her stick behind her, and sat on them.

"Never mind. We can stay indoors and play."

"But I don't want any bad days. I shan't have too many of them."

"Your vac. goes on till the middle of September, doesn't it?"

"Yes, but I can't stay here all that time."

"Why ever not?"

"I don't think I ought to stay more than a month."

"Tony! Why ever not?"

He shrugged his shoulders and did not answer.

"Oh, if you don't want to. . . ."

"Honor, you know I want to. . . ."

"Then why are you being silly? You'll stay here till the last possible moment."

"No."

She dismembered her stick-and-hand chair, and came up to him.

"Yes, you will—*please*."

Putting both hands on her shoulders he held her before him as a father might.

"God! Honor," he mumbled. "I . . ."

"What?"

"Oh . . . nothing . . ."

"What were you going to say?"

"Nothing, dear . . . nothing . . ."

She asked no more, but looked up at him, as at a stranger. Fool that he was, his eyes had filled in a way that must be visible and must be explained—with a part of the truth. "You should have seen yourself as you looked up just then, Honor. You—you seemed like an ideal become momentarily real, and it only left one with a sense that nothing is attainable and nothing lasts. . . . Everything's so fugitive and insecure. . . . Oh, I don't know what I am talking about. . . . These things can only be felt, not told. . . . This light is unreal, isn't it? Or the world is unreal, and we know it in a moment like this. . . . Honor, I . . ."

"What, Tony?"

"No. . . . Not again. . . ."

"Tony, do say what you were going to say—*please*."

"No."

To that she could add nothing. She turned away, but let

his arm feel lightly for her waist. And thus, side by side, they gazed at the beauty before them. The light was changing under their eyes, and they watched that lustrous gold on the Solent's strip go out like a lamp ; it was as quick to leave as the rose-tints on the clouds were slow, for these tip-toed away. The brilliance had died in the Channel, and an indigo darkness was spreading over it from the east ; but the schooner had not moved. Down in the bay they could see old Andrews in his boat coming home from the lobster-pots. The air chilled ; and, still holding each other, they began to walk down the hill-side very slowly, speaking no word, but exchanging a smile now and then. Darkness fell about them before they were near the cottage, but never once had they completely broken their mutual hold or their mutual silence.

CHAPTER V

AND SO TO KRUGER'S GRAVE

WHEN they entered the living-room of the cottage, the General glanced up.

"Eh, you're late, Honor. Have you kept the poor young man out all this time? He wants his supper, if *you* don't. O'Grogan, you mustn't let these selfish girls take advantage of your good nature."

"I won't," Tony agreed.

"I think of stretching my legs in a long walk to Newport to-morrow. Would you care to come?"

"Well, yes. . . . Yes, thank you very much."

"We might get there in time for tiffin, and then get the train back, in time for supper."

"Yes . . . yes, that would be splendid."

"How's that, Honor? I shall at least have got him a whole holiday from his bear-leading of you two cubs."

"It's all right; you won't get him," said Honor. "It's going to rain like billy-oh! to-morrow."

"Eh, *what*?" The General put up his monocle to bear on this point.

"There's a mackerel sky and a most unnatural light."

"Rain be damned!" He took his monocled eye to the window. "I see nothing. The weather looks to me to be 'Set Fair' if ever weather did. What says the glass?"

His monocle was now staring into the barometer, which his knuckle was tapping. Nothing happened in the barometer, and he tapped it again, his head, but not his eyes, turning a little to one side, as if he would bring a ear to the aid of the eyes. The action was bird-like and reminded Tony of a thrush listening for worms.

"The glass is high and stationary," he announced, dropping

the monocle. "You needn't worry, O'Grogan, we shall get our walk all right."

"But, Daddy darling," Jill submitted. "You know that that barometer is exactly like your eye-glass: it never sees a storm till it's actually arrived. Then it jumps about in the most extraordinary fashion."

"Ha, these girls!" the General smiled to Tony. "It amuses them to think they're much wiser than us. Well, we like 'em to be happy, don't we?" Always he seemed to forget that one of his daughters, Jill, was a year older than his guest; or perhaps he regarded Tony's sex as amounting to ten years' seniority. "But I'm not going to have them sacrificing you too far. Directly they begin to bore you, you mustn't hesitate to say so. And now, for pity's sake, call the Memsahib and let's have supper."

There was no walk on the morrow, for the weather broke in the night, and a procession of rainy days went gloomily by, like the shrouded figures of Banquo's kings. They stayed indoors, with their faces watching the rain patterning the panes of the lattice windows and beating down the flowers; till, under Tony's command, they procured oil-skins and sou'-westers from old Andrews and rowed out in his boat a mile from shore, where they paid out their line till it touched the bottom, and drew up the rock-whiting with monotonous regularity. Or they accompanied the old fisherman when he went out to his lobster pots, and Honor characterized the staring lobsters and the worried, escaping crabs as "perfectly sweet" and detected likenesses in them to the sidesmen of Chiswick Parish Church. Or beneath the unremitting rain they bathed in unmannerly seas—the only people in all Freshwater with the courage to do so. Or when August passed, they went out in their waterproofs and picked wet blackberries.

One day was fair, just before August closed, and they were mightily relieved to find that its clouds were broken, because there had been an excited hope among them that on this day a famous old friend from Tony's past would appear again in Freshwater. Tony had not been a day in the island before making inquiries whether Captain Alum was still alive and could be exhibited to newcomers singing his hymns along the skyline of the downs. And the people told him that though the old man's visits were rarer than they used to be, he was almost sure

to be on Afton Down on the 28th of August. And why that day of all others, Tony inquired. The people told him why, and he hid their story from the girls.

The afternoon of the 28th, if clear of rain, was windier than it need have been, and they set forth in overcoats, with hands pushed deep into pockets and collars turned up. Tony guiding them, they passed through the gate that closes the Military Road, and climbed a little way and then, breaking across the turf, paddled through the prickly gorse to the verge of the cliff. Here, looking down the precipice, they saw the sea bullying the rocks below. They walked along the turf to a little, low, dark obelisk which stood in its square of railings only a few paces from the precipice's brink. No other persons were near it, and Honor scoffed, "I don't believe he's coming. I don't believe there's anything in it."

"If he's alive, he'll come," said Tony. "He has too great a sense of drama not to appear at exactly his given moment."

"But you'd think that other people would have heard of it," Jill objected. "And there's not a soul in sight."

"Probably it's the weather," said Honor.

They were now standing by the little obelisk, and inevitably they read again the words cut upon its face that looked towards the sea. Or rather the girls read it, and Tony watched their expressions.

"Erected
In Remembrance
Of a Most Dear
And Only Child
Who Was Suddenly
Removed into Eternity
By a Fall From
The Adjacent Cliff
On the Rocks Beneath
28th August, 1846."

"Poor mite!" Jill whispered; but Honor exclaimed:

"Twenty-eighth of August! Why, that's to-day!"

"Yes," said Tony. "That's why he comes."

"Oh, then I think he must be rather a dear," said Jill, and Honor murmured, "Eighteen forty-six! Sixty-five years ago!" and they observed the discoloration on the stone of the obelisk and the rust on its unpainted railings.

"Here are some people coming."

It was Jill who had spoken ; and the others, looking down the slope, saw a figure climbing towards them, with a little chain of children hopping and skipping behind him, as a kite-tail flutters behind a kite. Further back a few staid adults followed the track of the children.

"It's the Captain himself," Tony announced. "Of course ! One might have guessed ! He's hardly the man not to collect his audience from the beach."

Jill and Honor's gaze had now run to meet the approaching captain, and was accompanying him up the hill, while their lips parted in admiration and amusement. The old man's long, waving hair and beard, both grey now, were rioting in the wind. His blue reefer jacket, perhaps given him by some coastguard, did not meet across his soiled white sweater and was kept in place by a huge leather belt, for he was much fatter than when Tony had last seen him, and so seemed shorter and stockier than ever. The peaked cap was in the same hand as his stick, which pierced the turf at every forward step of his left foot. The other hand grasped a book. And behind came the laughing and wondering children, as if they were playing in a charade of the Pied Piper.

"Oh, isn't he perfectly *sweet*," cried Honor. "I'm sure St. Paul looked just like that."

With such resolute steps did Captain Alum approach the obelisk that Tony, Jill and Honor were soon, of their shyness, retreating to a score of paces away, where they stood to see what should happen. First Captain Alum scanned the inscription, nodding several times in his profound appreciation of its sadness. Then he leaned his stick against the low railings, and hung his cap upon them, and clasped his hands in front of his breast, as far as the book between them would allow, and silently prayed. Which done, he invited the children to come a little closer, for they needn't be afraid of an old, old man who loved all God's pretty ones. And they obeyed.

"Children," he began—and Tony and the girls came a few steps nearer to hear, "sixty-five years ago, which is before your dear fathers and dear mothers were born, a little child in the midst of a happy August holiday fell from this cliff here and met the dear Lord on the rocks below. 'Fear not,' I think He said, 'it is I.' And this stone marks that God was very close to this place one day, when he came to lift up a little bairn by the hand. It is like the stone which Jacob erected in the wilderness,

saying, 'Surely God is in this place and I knew it not.' Sixty-five years ago to-day! and I cannot think that the dear heartbroken parents are yet alive; they have rejoined their 'dear and only child' in the beautiful heaven above. But in their love they placed this tiny monument here, no higher than a child, that when they should be gone from hence, there might still be people who would remember their little one. And shall we disappoint them? Shall it be nothing to us who pass by? No, no, my pretties . . ."

So the sermon went on; and there were large tears in the old preacher's eyes; and Tony preferred to believe that they sprang as much from a good heart as from the overwrought imagination of an actor. Captain Alum had not the vigour of body or mind that he had shown in the years before; his talent for phrase and his humour had weakened; he repeated himself in the distressing way of senility; but Tony still found that familiar words spoken by him, perhaps because of the picturesqueness of his figure and of his setting, filled themselves with a peculiar potency. Never before, though he had heard his father, in the grandest voice, close a dozen church-years with the same lesson, did noble words mean so much to him as when Captain Alum, at the close of his address, opened his book with the shaking hands of an old man, and read "Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them; while the sun, or the light, or the moon, or the stars be not darkened, nor the clouds return after the rain."

The lesson read, Captain Alum asked his congregation to think of the lost child, and to pray silently. And when he had given them time enough to pray, he suddenly—for at least in his dramatic sense there was no weakening—burst without warning into a hymn. In a voice far less powerful than of old and troubled by breathlessness, he sang:

"There's a Friend for little children
Above the bright blue sky,
A Friend Who never faileth,
Whose love will never die;"

and to Tony listening, a hundred Sunday afternoons, most of them wintry in atmosphere, came visiting memory.

Captain Alum had hoped that the children, knowing the hymn by heart, would join in, but they only stared silently,

and some giggled. So he began to conduct them with his shaking hand, and, meeting with no response, dropped the hand and continued alone :

“ Our earthly friends may fail us,
And change with changing years ;
This Friend is always worthy
Of that dear name He bears. . . . ”

Tony was staring now with chin dropped and fixed eyes. “ Our earthly friends may fail us, And change with changing years. . . . ” Wavers. . . . Raking. . . . Sibyl Chandry. . . . Doyly. . . . Peggy. . . . Jill and Honor. Jill and Honor; they had failed him in his first twenty years, in so far as they had not come into his life, and one day they would fail him again, departing from him—or he would go from them—even though . . . The thought swelled his love for Honor, and he looked down sideways at her. How he wanted her, for the little while allowed them. Honor, let’s make the most of the time. And Jill. Strange that the thought of losing Jill could be so sharp a pain.

Captain Alum, sustaining his hymn alone, carried it to its end with a diminishing interest and energy. His “ Amen ” was hardly heard, and suggested disappointment. He picked up his stick from the railings round the obelisk and put on the peaked cap, and turning his breast towards the upward slope of the hill, trudged away, singing quietly to himself the words of his unsuccessful hymn.

A few days later the weather recovered its high spirits, and a wheel of suns swung round the heavens ; but each chased the other far too quickly, for it was September now. There was an evening when Jill and her parents had gone to a foursome on the links, and Tony and Honor were alone with their novels in the living-room, and the two facts of September and a sunset, both blazing through the window, were oppressing Tony so heavily that his eyes would stray from the pages of his book to the crown of his companion’s head ; and he was thinking, “ Surely she will not let me go without speaking.” The one remnant of his old irrationality was this fixed idea that Honor, having repulsed him twice, must now take the first step if they were to declare their love.

“ Tedious ! Dull stuff ! ” he grumbled, tossing his book on the table ; and Honor said promptly, “ Let’s go out,” just as

if this conception had been occupying her mind for the last half-hour.

They took their sticks from the corner of the room and went out into the horizontal light. It lay on the green boles of the beeches, and down the ruddy barks of the pines; it rested along the curved top of the quick-set hedges and splashed the western fronts of the houses, so that they saw the shapes of nature in their roundness and the buildings of men very square.

With few words, and they banal, he led her through the gate of Tennyson's Lane into a dappled darkness under that vault of trees. "This evening, this evening," he kept saying to himself as they strolled along in uncommunicative dreaming. He remembered how when he was fifteen he had walked unhappily up this lane with Emily Holt, and had dreamed then of the time when he would be walking in a solitude with the girl he loved. And here they were together in the same lane.

There is a chalk-pit at the foot of the downs if they are reached by the road that branches from Tennyson's Lane; and across the semicircle of its floor a long turfed ridge, like a giant's grave. To the O'Grogan family this long heave of turf was known as Kruger's Grave, because Derek had once, in a boyhood much impressed by the South African War, employed the flints and stones and chalk-chips lying around to print along its top, "Here lies Kruger, R. I. P." That was a dozen years ago, and the first high wind had swept his inscription away, but otherwise Tony and Honor found the long heave as undisturbed and unchanged as the grave of a great man has a right to be. Only the bramble bushes which had then been but a knee's height had grown into tall entanglements and made a covering for the giant's feet. They sat together near the grave's head, which was a hummock higher than the rest of it, as if the giant beneath had lifted his head and pillowed it above his shoulders. Honor reclined with an elbow on this hummock; and Tony, leaning both elbows on his knees, drew patterns on the ground with his stick.

"I wish you weren't going," said Honor.

"I must. And I can't think how you have endured me so long."

"The lad fishes for his compliment."

"He does nothing of the sort. I——"

"You know you've just *made* our holiday. Having ten times our brains—or at least ten times mine—you've made our holiday

out of your extraordinary imagination, just as you make one of your old poems. And you know we're properly grateful."

"Grateful!" In a low voice he scoffed at the bloodless word.

"Oh, I *hate* you sometimes."

"That's better."

"I'm trying to be nice. What do you want me to say?"

For answer he looked into her face, and she met his glance with unflinching eyes, her brows uplifted as if at a loss for his meaning. But the colour at her cheeks was in poorer control. He turned away with a sigh; and she sat upright.

"Tony . . . oh, *isn't* this dreadfully awkward . . . ? I want to say what you want me to say, if only you'll tell me what it is."

Tony's silence proclaimed his pride.

"If you don't tell me, Tony, I can't, can I?"

He drew a sweeping circle with his stick, and, beating points along its circumference, submitted:

"I've told you twice—once in a letter which you ignored, and once at a ball when you stopped me like a child who was going too far. . . . I cannot tell you a third time and take a third reprimand. You may like administering them, but it hurts me."

"Tony, how *can* you? . . . I couldn't say I loved you till I was sure——"

"Till!" He had not raised his eyes from his geometry on the ground, but the word "till" had dropped into him like yeast, raising a fermentation. "*Till* you were sure? Honor, what does 'till' mean?"

"Did I say 'till'? Lordy, I wonder what I could have meant by that!"

"Did it mean all that I wanted?"

"I don't know," she parried. "It might have done."

"Honor, did it, dear?"

" . . . Yes. . . . Oh, yes, Tony. . . ."

Enough: she was in his arms and taking his kisses; and her hand was passing over his head, and holding the column of his neck, and feeling for his back and his shoulders; and beneath this touch which was that of a girl who, lost from thought, was sending him thus the whole of her love, his passion stretched beyond the reach of words, and he poured back his answer through a tremble in his arms; and his ecstasy,

very near to pain, communicated itself more and more to her, till, between her kisses which were now vying with his in their hard assault, she began to gasp, "Tony . . . ! O Tony . . . !"

In that suppressed, impassioned cry, he imagined he was hearing an answer from the world outside to that need of his which had been crying to it all his life ; and strange triumphant thoughts leapt like lightnings about his mind : "I have found it. . . . This is to be satisfied at last. . . . One can rest, having known this. . . ."

The last of the light was gone, and in the dusk, as he relaxed his hold, he knew a second of sadness that this supreme moment should be already over ; he glimpsed again the fugitiveness and insecurity of all things ; but the sadness could not last in his unbelievable joy, and now holding her lightly, he asked :

"We are engaged, Honor ?"

"Yes, yes."

"When shall we marry ?"

"Oh, when *can* we, darling ?"

"At once. . . . Or very, very soon."

"But, Tony, how—how ?"

"We shall be poor."

"Oh, I don't mind. I've never been used to much."

"I think we can do it. I shall get a non-resident post at another school. And we shall have a tiny house——"

"O Tony, it'll be too unbearably lovely."

"Let's go home and tell them all."

"Had we better tell them just yet—'cept Jill ? Daddy'll never understand."

Tony stood up, saying, "He must understand ;" and taking her hand, he raised her to her feet. "Come, let's hear what he says."

But before they started on the homeward walk, he drew her for another embrace. And they kissed but gently now, like old lovers.

CHAPTER VI

THE CAMPAIGN

HIS parley with the General was not a success.

When the two men were seated together after supper, he said "Yes, yes," and "Quite so," to a dissertation by his host whose subject matter had eluded him; and when the dissertation halted, he proffered a diffident, "Sir. . . ." This unusual mode of address, together with its unusual tone, lifted the General's head.

"Eh, yes, yes? What?" said the General, unconsciously frowning at him.

"Have you any objection, sir, to my being engaged to your daughter?"

"What, what?"

The General could hardly have faced a thing more remote from his speculations, had his Adjutant entered his Orderly Room with information that a junior subaltern of B Company was seeking permission to marry the Quartermaster. He fumbled with a trembling hand for the support of his eyeglass. The words he intended to use were "Good God, no!" but in his confusion he fixed the eyeglass and said, "Engaged to my daughter? Which one?"

"Honor, sir."

"Honor." He repeated the name, and then perceived that its introduction had done nothing to relieve his bewilderment. "But you're not in love with each other, are you?" he inquired, floundering backwards to a first cause.

"Yes, sir."

"Good God! I've known nothing about this. My wife's known nothing about it."

"No, sir. We only . . . we only told each other this evening."

"Told each other this evening! Did Honor say so, too, then?"

"Yes, sir."

"Good God!"

Tony was conscious that though the monocle was staring at him from beneath eyebrows drawn together, the eyes behind were hardly seeing him, for the brain was occupied with righting itself.

"Engaged? I thought you were just friends. 'Their brother,' the girls always called you."

"I loved Honor from the first moment I saw her, sir."

"And when was that?"

"At Joyce's wedding."

"Good God! No, my boy, this is too quick work altogether." His brain was clearing. He got out of his chair and went to the hearth-rug and turned to stare again at the seated Tony. Being quite unoriginal, he had no dislike of triteness, and no ear for it, if he heard it. "You can't know your own minds yet."

"By heaven, I do, sir."

"Of course you think you do, but you don't. And be damned, Honor doesn't! She's only a baby. She doesn't come of age for three months."

"She says she's ready to marry me."

"Does she? . . . To-morrow, I suppose? . . . Oh, I see now why you've been so willing to put up with her all this holiday. Ha, ha! So you've been imagining yourselves in love with one another. Well, I never!"

"No, sir," snapped Tony, rather angrily. "We've imagined nothing."

This new note slightly startled the General.

"What?"

But he recovered. "Oh, come, my boy, don't be silly. How can she marry you? I understand you've only a small stipend."

"I believe I can get a hundred and fifty pounds a year, if I take a non-resident post."

"The whole thing's ridiculous, my boy," the General pronounced, lifting his eyebrow and scattering the monocle on his vest, as if he would drop the subject with it. "I'm sorry to sound harsh, but you can't marry on a hundred and fifty pounds a year. Besides, it's too quick altogether. You'll have forgotten it in a year's time."

Protestations rushed to Tony's lips, but he held them back, and only asked in a voice not free from hauteur :

"So I'm to understand, sir, that you refuse your consent even to a long engagement?"

"Certainly. I can't have her tied up as early as this."

"Then, I think, sir, you'd better forbid me to see her, too. Because I don't feel that I can give any undertaking that I shan't try to hold her to me."

"What?" The General's mouth went rather angrily to one side to snap this out: "Whad'd'you mean?" It was the tone he had used in his Orderly Room to remind a subaltern that Battalion Orders were Battalion Orders, and not an opening for argument. And probably in those days, the subaltern's answer had been a smart salute and a departure from the room. But not now. Tony rose from his chair and began to explain his meaning with an outer ease and an inner pride in his language.

"I mean I can't promise that I won't try to persuade Honor that, even if we mayn't be engaged *de jure*, we are *de facto*."

"De *what*?" demanded the General. "Good God, what language you boys do use! De *bell*! Put in plain English, that means that your asking for my consent is all a farce because you intend to be engaged to her in any case—ur? That's your drift, is it?"

Tony began to feel uncomfortable: he was a guest in this man's house and must withdraw his majestic horns rather than prod the old gentleman with them. He dropped from grandeur into boyishness.

"No, sir; not quite. It—it means that I want your consent most frightfully, but I can't—I simply can't pretend that if you allow me to see Honor, I shan't treat her as the girl who has promised that she will marry me. I only want to be honest."

"Look here, O'Grogan—or Tony, as I suppose I must call you. I'm not going to quarrel." The General replaced the monocle that his last words might receive the emphasis and dignity of ceremonial utterance, and inwardly applauded the manner in which he, as a man of the world, was going to handle the situation. "I like you far too well. I like your openness and your eagerness—and your simplicity, if you'll forgive me for saying so. And to show you that I am not in the least afraid of your very honest threats, I shall *not* forbid you to see Honor. Honor takes her orders from me, and not from you. See her as much as you like. You couldn't marry

her for years so there's nothing in all that nonsense. It'll probably be best for you to see each other and not work yourselves up into some idiotic love-sickness. And in a little while you'll know that I've been completely reasonable. And now let's all be good friends together. Ha, ha, I can't have your family taking *all* my chickens, can I?"

Tony went out to find Honor. His mind was not clear as to his future course; but this much he saw: that, let the General treat the recent interview as lightly as he cared, for himself it had meant the opening of a war, and that, in the coming campaign, though the enemy had all the material advantages, he at least possessed two immaterial ones—an excellent British General's grave over-confidence, and Honor's certain loyalty. Her deliberate and wordless kiss when she heard his tale confirmed his assurance. He found himself thinking in the grand manner. "I shall touch her love to heroism," he thought, recalling an old phrase. "She said, 'Nothing desperate or dangerous ever happens in Chiswick.' Well, something damned desperate is going to happen in Chiswick soon, if you ask me." What the phrases portended he had yet to determine; but they excited him, who was more encouraged by phrases than he would have liked to admit. "I have warned the General," he decided. "I've fairly and honestly warned the old bird, and now I can go ahead."

Home again in Chiswick, he had still no clear vision of the campaign in front of him, except that he must open it at once and prosecute it with set teeth. In theory this is but a poor state of mind from which to launch your attack, but it has been known, not seldom in the history of these islands, to be successful.

The very morning after his arrival home he was in the train, with his teeth set, as he rumbled towards the offices of the scholastic agents: Landseer, Thyme and Co., Leman and Finchley, Ltd., and Mr. Peidestros. Landseer, Thyme and Co. and Leman and Finchley, Ltd. took his name and requirements with less head-shaking than they had shown five years earlier, for he was now twenty-three, and looked it, with his tall, stable figure, his wide shoulders, and his skin printed with the lines of thought and humour. These firms were hopeful. But he

felt an easier heart when he was mounting the iron-bound stairs to the office of Mr. Peidestros; Mr. Peidestros being a warm and living, if roguish person—not a firm.

Mr. Peidestros's own voice answered his knock; and when he entered, Mr. Peidestros himself stood up to welcome him, rising from behind a desk so untidy that it looked as if the waste-paper baskets and ash-trays had been emptied over it. Mr. Peidestros had not changed in five years: he had the same tall, straight figure, the same grey suit, the same mop of curly iron-grey hair, and the same smooth olive skin.

"Good morning, Mr. Peidestros," he greeted him.

"Good morning, good morning, Mr.—yes—of course, I remember you well—Mr. Chambers, isn't it, for whom we found that post at Loughborough. How are you doing there, my boy? I heard excellent accounts of you from the Reverend Soule. Do be seated." He addressed both his fin-like hands, palms upward, towards the chair by the desk.

Tony sat down and explained that he was not Mr. Chambers who went to Loughborough, but Mr. O'Grogan who went to Stratton Lye.

"Oh, yes, certainly! I remember you well. But you were much younger then. About seventeen. I was a bit apprehensive of you, you looked so young, but you've filled out"—he flapped Tony on the breast with the back of his right hand—"and you've done well, haven't you? I heard excellent accounts of you from Mr. Sugden, when he was last here. You're not leaving him, are you? Good! Must make changes sometimes, and we'll find you something—we'll find you something. Have a cigarette."

He offered his client one of the Russian cigarettes in their coffee-coloured paper, and took one himself; and across the smoke of these cigarettes—Mr. Peidestros's cigarette often waving about—Tony outlined his present needs. As before, he was not a little sensitive to the presence of the girl typists; who, however, clicked on, indifferently as clocks.

"A non-resident post." Mr. Peidestros rounded and threw forward his lips, shaking his head. He drew at the cigarette and waved it to one side. "Not so easily got, my boy. It's a different class of work. Older boys, you see, at grammar or cathedral schools."

"I shouldn't mind that."

"Yes, but you offer Classics chiefly, don't you?—Have you

got Mr. O'Grogan's file, Miss Cape? Thank you. . . . Yes, you offer, I see, Scholarship Classics, French, All English Subjects, Divinity, Mathematics, All Games. . . . Come, that's not so bad."

"Yes, but *you* offered all that," Tony smiled. "*I* didn't."

"With perfect faith, my boy; perfect confidence. And you've justified it. Pity you can't offer Modern Languages. That's one of the best horses to ride now, if you haven't a degree. You couldn't, I suppose, nip over to France for a month at Christmas, and polish up your Modern Languages. A little hard work, and you ought to be able to offer Modern Languages to Sixth Form Standard."

Tony didn't think this was possible.

"Wurl. . . ." Mr. Peidestros lifted resigned eyebrows. "Pity! Of course we may be able to do something on your Classics and French and English. And you score in an interview, my boy. But why do you want to leave prep-school work? *That's* your line."

"I want to marry."

"*Ob-hh-b-b-b-b-b!*" It was a very long, very knowing "Oh!" It mooned up into Mr. Peidestros's treble and down again; and Tony felt the girl typists becoming horribly real. Mr. Peidestros nodded several times. "*Yurse*, now we see daylight. . . . Marry? . . . H'm. . . . If you want to make a home for the lady, I should try to get a partnership, or a school of your own, not a non-resident post. If you could raise the capital, I could do something good for you in that line. Has the lady any money?"

"No," answered Tony, refusing to mind the girl typists.

"They so seldom have," sighed Mr. Peidestros. "Pity! So seldom. I could have set up a young couple like you very nicely. I should have liked to. . . . You know some men borrow money, start a school and go bankrupt. . . . But I don't want you to do that; no, I don't want you to do that. It's not strictly honest, I suppose. . . . Still, you don't propose to live on one hundred and fifty pounds a year, do you?"

"I thought I could get a house, and do some private coaching as well."

"That's not strictly allowed under agreements . . . but you can do it; bless my soul, you can do it."

"I have known several who have done it," Tony explained.

"*Yurse*—yes, yes." Mr. Peidestros nodded. In a rich

voice, as of a father blessing all their enterprises, he repeated: "Yurse, yes, yes. Certainly. . . . But if you're going to do that, I should recommend you to read for a London degree. It impresses the parents. It's the letters, B.A., that go down. You needn't put 'Lond.' after them. Couldn't you read for a London degree?"

Tony looked at the point of his cigarette and thought of his poetry; must he desert that like a tree that could yield him no fruit? No, not yet: and Honor would stand by him in it; the hour in the campaign had not yet come that would call for its sacrifice. So he shook his head, and said he wouldn't have time to read for a degree as he had another fish to fry in his spare hours.

"Really?" asked Mr. Peidestros, quite interested. "Any money in it?"

"Can't say," Tony laughed. "Shouldn't think so. But it's got to be done."

"What is it, if I may ask? I might be able to help you."

Tony was far more ashamed of proclaiming to the girl clerks his spare-time occupation than of announcing his marriage—of which, to say the truth, he was rather proud.

"I try to write," he confessed.

Mr. Peidestros threw forward his lips in distrust of such a pastime.

"Oh, *writing*. Not much in that. The *Daily Mail* pays well, I believe, but there's a terrible crowd at the gate. . . . Some people bring it off sometimes, of course," he mused.

"But mine is Poetry," Tony corrected, offended at this mention of the *Daily Mail*.

"Poetry? H'm . . . well . . ." Mr. Peidestros left the subject as no longer susceptible of treatment. "You'll be wanting this post next term, I suppose?"

"If you can get it for me. I want to marry as soon as possible."

"Yurse, yes, yes. Of course you do," assented Mr. Peidestros in a richly sympathetic voice. "Naturally, naturally. I'll look round at once. I'm most interested in all you tell me. You must bring your little lady to see me, before you go back to Mr. Sugden. Yes, bring the little lady. Is she handy?"

"She'll be back from her holidays in a few days."

"Bring her round, my boy. She's beautiful, I suppose?"

"She's not bad."

"Ha, ha! 'Not bad.' You've seen worse, eh? Is she in the scholastic way, too?"

"Lord, no! She's only twenty, and she's so far stayed at home with her father who's a retired Major-General."

"Is he. Is he now?" Up went Mr. Peidestros's eyebrows. "Couldn't we use him as a reference?"

"No, I shouldn't do that. No, don't do that, please."

"No? Well, praps not, praps not. And, to be frank, we don't find military men of great use as references. They seem to think it bad form to write enthusiastically about young men, and they always think themselves compelled in honour to mention any little shortcomings one of our clients may have—which is no good to anybody. Only the other day a Colonel-man knocked a magnificent post out of my hands"—Mr. Peidestros stretched forward the offended hands, palms upward and empty—"just as they had closed on it, by admitting that the boy was rather young for such work. Wurl! . . . we don't want references like that, do we? No, clergy are the people: they like to do a good turn by their young parishioners, and they're used to writing things up, with their sermons and all. And they go down, too. Better than anybody else, almost. It's funny. I can't see why, but there it is! But now, my boy, wouldn't this father-in-law of yours put up a little something towards starting you in a partnership?"

"I don't think so. He's not very well off. Retired Indian Army, you see."

"Oh, Indian Army, is he? Yes, there's not much in that. Well, we must do what we can for you." They had risen, and his hand was on his young client's shoulder. "I feel an interest in you quite apart from business. I no longer think of it as business. Good-bye, my boy."

A few days later, Tony led Honor, who was inclined to giggle and hang back, up the iron-bound stairs to see Mr. Peidestros, not so much to please Mr. Peidestros as to divert Honor, who, he felt, would pronounce the handsome old agent "perfectly adorable."

On their entry Mr. Peidestros rose; recognized them; put both his long hands together like the folded wings of a butterfly; opened them like the same wings taking to the air again; and, smiling such a smile as a god might give to two of his children, said: "*Wurl*, well, well."

Hastily Tony began to talk business.

"No, no," Mr. Peidestros demurred. "Oh, no. Don't let's talk business. I'll do what I can for you, be sure, but not in business; in friendship. Sit down, dear lady. . . . So you two are engaged, are you?" and, sinking into his chair, he stared at them as if they were the loveliest sight he had seen for many a day. It is possible that, in that office, they were so.

Honor did not answer him, but Tony was prompt with his "Yes."

"And you want to get married soon?"

"Yes."

"Well, we must find a place for him next term, dear lady, mustn't we? And you must give him a term to get settled in, and then we'll marry you in the Easter holidays. How will that do?"

Tony said it would do excellently.

"Parents all agreeable, eh?"

"Not frightfully," said Tony.

"Aren't they?" Mr. Peidestros raised his eyebrows. "Not as agreeable as they might be? They so often aren't. Still . . . you're going ahead, no doubt?"

"Perhaps," nodded Tony; and the agent nodded back to him.

"Yurse, yes, yes. Quite right. Yurse, you go ahead and take your chances. Life opens all sorts of gangways to a little bluff—that's what I always say. The *fait accompli* is what you've got to aim at, dear lady. Present our young friend to your parents as a *fait accompli*. I've nearly always found it successful with my headmasters; if they've been diffident about some young client of mine, I've seen that they've engaged him before they quite realized what was happening, and once they've got him, they find that he's as good as another. Yurse, every bit as good. Most people are. It's what you'll find out about yourselves, if ever the first bloom departs, which I hope it won't. I'm sure you look made for each other."

He beamed on them; and Tony saw that after a lifetime spent in affecting engagements, he was compelled to play his part in bringing off a similar piece of business in a different market.

"Let's see: you've come of age, my dear, haven't you?"

The fingers of one hand were smoothing his long nose to a point as he asked this; and when Honor said she was still three months away from her majority, the hand waved six inches to the right, to dispose of so small a technicality.

"Wurl, that's as good as makes no difference. And when you're a little older, I dare say I shall be able to get him

somewhere where he can be a housemaster. . . . Make a lot of money out of boarders, if you know how. . . . But"—he gave the *grand seigneur's* wink to Tony—"you read for that degree, my boy. Then I shall be able to do much more for you. It'll be heavy going, I dare say, but she's worth it, isn't she, ha, ha ! . . . Well, well, this is magnificent."

Out on the pavements again, Honor exclaimed with a skip : "O Tony, he's too good to be true. Where *did* you find him ? I'm sure he's the Devil. O Tony, do you think we've sold ourselves to the Devil ?"

"No," said Tony, affecting seriousness. "No, I don't think he's the Principle of Evil. He's the Principle of Mischief, I think. We've sold ourselves to that."

"So thrilling !" exclaimed Honor with another skip. "But, Tony, what are we really going to do ?"

"I'm not clear yet. First of all I'm going to establish myself in a better strategic position for arguing with your father."

Honor was satisfied. As long as plans were as indefinite as this she could enjoy them without fear. "Oh, I hope the Principle of Mischief does something quickly," she said.

But Mr. Peidestros was not destined to dance more mischievously into this affair than with his encouragement, his sanguine plans, and his blessing. Tony went back to Stratton Lye and told the full truth to Mr. Sugden, in the course of tendering his resignation. And that excellent pylon of a man, that monumental automatic cashing machine, was disorganized and perturbed by the news, to a degree most flattering to a young master. Mr. Sugden accepted his resignation, but begged him to consider his steps carefully, and characterized them as "surely rather wild," and shook his head sadly over each one of Tony's plans as it was submitted to him ; and he would have been quite unable to analyse, had he ever thought to do so, by how many parts, in this mixture, his self-interest exceeded his paternal solicitude. From all the unselfish standpoints he could think of, he put the case for Tony's staying where he was : he put it from the point of view of Tony's future ; he put it from the point of view of the girl ; he put it from the point of view of the peculiar nobility of prep-school work ; he put it from the point of view of the Housing Problem, and of coal and rates and confinements and Life Insurance ; and, in short, it was perfectly obvious that Mr. Sugden thought that the loss of Tony would be a serious wound to Stratton Lye.

He certainly did think so. He knew that the school's rich raiding in the scholarship fields was largely due to the exceptional flair for classical literature in this young man, and to the infectiousness of his enthusiasm; he knew that when Mr. O'Grogan was teaching Eclogues or Elegiacs, he was not task-mastering among slaves but proselytizing among aspirants; so he begged him to beware of early matrimony.

But Tony's teeth were set—he was taking his classes and conducting his football games with teeth set—and the headmaster was at length obliged to swallow and digest the unpalatable draught; after which, somewhat impressed by his own stoicism, he promised every help to his departing colleague. And Tony had several flying afternoons in town, for the interviewing of headmasters, on whom he was sensible that he had made a favourable impression; and about half-term he was offered a post at St. Bede's Prebendal School, Colborough.

Mr. Sugden was much worried by this news and came into the Common Room to inquire the stipend which had been offered him. When he heard it was one hundred and fifty pounds non-resident, he seemed to debate within himself a minute and then go out with an inward groan at so huge a sum. "Take it if you think it wise, I don't," were his last words.

It was then about eight o'clock, and the post did not leave Hurst again till the next morning; and at half-past ten Mr. Sugden entered the room again, glanced round, and seemed pleased to discover that Mr. O'Grogan was still here—writing at the table. But he didn't like to see him writing. He fell into a chair: he was tired, for he had spent the last two and a half hours walking up and down his study, like a financier whose stocks were falling or a general whose battle went ill.

"About that post, O'Grogan. I've been thinking it over, and I've a proposition to make. I give you a hundred resident now. What do you say to stopping here if I offer you a hundred and fifty non-resident?"

Tony stood up, his face alight.

"There's nothing I should like better, sir."

This eagerness was a tactical error; only a little hesitation or even a silence of thirty seconds, and Mr. Sugden would have mentioned the possibility of earning a little more by capitation fees. He did, in point of fact, mention it now, but it was to make clear that the possibility must be regarded as out of the

question. "Of course, that's a large salary, and it'd have to cover everything; capitation fees, for instance."

"Oh, quite," agreed Tony. "Of course."

Again an error; for had he demurred, Mr. Sugden would have mentioned the hope of a "rise" later on. He did mention it, but to destroy it. "And you'd have to treat it as a rise, covering the next few years. It's a large salary for a prep-school to pay a man of your age."

"Quite," agreed Tony. "I think it's awfully nice of you."

"No, no: I want to help you in any way I can. Your duties would be just the same; you would just feed and sleep at your own home."

"Yes, yes." Tony was ready to excel Mr. Sugden in generosity; to meet him, not half way, but at his very doorstep. The words "at your own home" sent an exhilarating shiver about his body. They returned when the headmaster had gone; and they painted a cottage somewhere down one of these lanes; a lonely cottage, with windows that looked towards the great crown of Wolstonbury Hill; with Honor behind its dimity curtains or sleeping in its dimity bed. The lines of a song that had rolled from every barrel-organ that year, to stir all hearts, whether in broad squares or in narrow slums—so they were young hearts on the sunny side of disillusion—rolled over and over in his mind, as if that were a barrel-organ too; and he felt no shame in the delight they gave him, for they were true, exquisitely true, to the emotions within him

"There are arms that will welcome me in,
There are lips I am burning to kiss,
There are two eyes that shine, just because they are mine,
And a thousand things other men miss."

And next time he wrote to Honor, he called her "his thousand things," inviting her to discover the allusion.

He wrote also to Mr. Peidestros, but Mr. Peidestros, like a man deeply hurt, returned no answer for a long time. When at last his answer came, it proved to be no congratulatory letter, but a formal bill "for clerical and other expenses."

Now in his evening walks he sauntered down the lanes to direct his eyes to the outside of cottages which, were their occupants but to die or to depart, could take the centre of his

picture very pleasingly. He composed no verses as he sauntered ; he was too satisfied and too serene. He composed sitting-rooms and bedrooms.

One evening he struck westward across the Brighton Road and found himself in a little lost hamlet of half-timbered cottages, most of which looked placidly westward ; while the others, which were obliged to face eastward, shyly hid themselves behind the houses opposite. It was Albourne Green. But all these cottages had curtains in their windows, and he walked on up a road whose name, so an old labourer told him, was Benfelly Lane. The name charmed him, who had once made researches in Domesday Book for the purposes of his poetry, because he instantly suspected that in the " Benfelly " of this labourer the old Domesday " Benefelle " survived after nine hundred years. And then to see " Beanfield Farm " painted on a gate was a further thrill, and he walked on towards Twineham. He had almost forgotten the object of his journeying, when he suddenly realized that he was passing a cottage, and that it was empty. " Gosh ! " said he.

It had no beauty except the beauty of age : it was but a rectangular building with a roof to it—a Noah's ark with a chimney stack at either end. The porch was in the middle and its pillars were two tree trunks painted brown ; on each side of the porch was the sashed window, painted white, of a sitting-room ; and above, at equal distances, were the three sashed windows of the bedrooms. And all the windows were absurdly small. But age, using this barn-shaped dwelling as a palate, had daubed and dusted it with all the colours of the surrounding landscape. On the roof which was unusually steep—steep with the steepness of a voice that has soared to its top-note, and with the same vibrato—it had turned the tiles to a meadow-brown, and either powdered them with the grey-green of the beech boles or patched them with clumps of rusty moss from the roadside. The bricks which had once been red it had darkened to a neutral tint, and slavered some with the yellow-green of wheatfields, and hidden others with the golden, velvety pile of its moss. At one corner it had bound the house to the earth with an old ivy's limbs, nigh dead, but knotty and strong as a wagoner's arms, and with ankles as hairy as a stallion's fetlocks.

While he was pausing there, the old labourer who had given him the name of Benfelly Lane, slouched past.

"Ev'nun, zur."

"Good evening. This cottage is empty, isn't it?"

The labourer halted, that the whole of his brain might be devoted to a correct treatment of this question. Though he must have passed the cottage every evening of his life on his homeward journey, he looked now at its closed windows, its smokeless chimneys, its weedy brick-path, and the high grasses in its garden, and his eyes recorded the slow working of a Sussex brain.

"Aye, her be empty all right."

"What's it called?"

But the labourer had not yet disentangled himself from the previous question, and he announced, after a further examination of the house, that he was ratified in his first opinion.

"Aye, her be middlin' empty, bayn't she?"

"Yes, but what's it called?"

The labourer now looked at Tony, to get this new question properly into focus.

"Called? Sheep's Eye, her be." He was completely sure of it. "Aye, Sheep's Eye, that's her name."

"Sheep's Eye?" Tony ransacked his memory. "Is that a corruption of Shipley, or Sepelei, as it used to be?" he asked learnedly.

"Shipley? Noah, Shipley's eight mile or mower from here on t'other side of the Adur. Sheep's Eye, her be."

"But perhaps she wasn't always called that."

"It's bin that as long as I known it, which is seventy years."

"One could rent it, I suppose?"

The labourer's answer was unconsciously devastating.

"Aye, she's bin rented afore now."

Tony smiled.

"It's the sort of place I should like to have myself."

When the full implications of this remark had passed through the labourer's staring eyes into his brain, he rather surprised Tony by expressing no surprise.

"Aye, a gen'l'man had it once afore—though I don't know that he was by good rights a gen'l'man. However, he lived there without working; he wrote for the papers, they said, though I never see owt of his meself, and he gave talks on platforms. After him Dummelow had it, who was Farmer Orde's man, him of Thatcher's Spinney Farm. 'Tain't properly a gen'l'man's cottage, I don't call it."

"I must make further inquiries."

"Aye, you could do that. Well, I must be getting along hoam, I must now, if you'll excuse me."

"Certainly. Good night."

"Yes. I'll be gwene now."

"Righto! Good night."

"Night, zur."

Tony passed through the gate, and walked in the garden. It was much overgrown and weedy, and evidently the late occupant had used all of it for vegetables. But there were well-grown shrubs up either side of the brick path: veronica and laurestinus and berberis and mock-orange; and beside the porch was a box-tree cut into the shape of a cone.

"One could turn all this front into grass," he thought.

He walked along the untidy hedge on the left that separated the garden from a meadow, and he counted the hedge-plants which had quarrelled for its making: hazel and thorn and elder and blackberry and sloe. This brought him behind the house, and he learned that the back garden was separated from a meadow only by a fence of oak posts and wire, so that one could look down the grassland as it fell gently away to a dark spinney.

Now let him look through the front windows: very small but very possible were these ground-floor rooms with their big fireplaces. What of the bedrooms? Could one mount to their windows? He looked at the tough branches of the old ivy, and decided that something could be done. It was done very easily, and soon he was suspended like a fruit below the sill of a bedroom window and peeping in. Yes, much could be made of little rooms like these; and what of the view from up here? Turning his head to the left, he saw over a flat stretch of weald the whole pack of the downs coming towards him, with Wolstonbury king of the pack. An endorsement jumped at his heart. And at that point his muscles protested against holding him longer, and he hastily and clumsily descended.

Then he went out through the gate, latching it behind him carefully, like one who had a proprietary interest in this enclosure.

The Christmas vacation was a holiday, not only from Stratton Lye and work, but from time itself—a four weeks' delay in the supra-temporal nowhere of love. No doubt the bodies of the

youngest O'Grogan and the youngest Daubeny were to be seen in the Chiswick streets, or on Wimbledon Common when the frost came, or in Richmond Park when the snow was down—in which time their bodies might even have been seen face downward on a toboggan—or in the Daubeny's house on the Mall for the Christmas party, when these same bodies were decorated so carefully that one might have supposed them the loyalest residents of this, our temporal world; but, none the less, the truth remains that all this outward gaiety was largely a concession to the tenants of an order other than that in which Tony and Honor were living, and that, at every possible moment, they escaped into this silent region of their own, and dwelt there with linked hands.

Welcoming her lover at Victoria Station, Honor dispersed that considerable structure at a breath—the breath of a kiss. Every trace of it faded out, with all its population and its porters and its locomotives, like the insubstantial pageant it probably is—as, her arms about his neck, she whispered her ecstatic: “Tony! Tony!” And they stood in a district too still, too soundless, too empty of all but its own golden light for any thinking man to account it a part of our present changing world.

And the translation of Antony O'Grogan and Honor Daubeny to these unreal planes (or more real planes, according as different philosophies may esteem them) explains why, for the present, the difficulty of the Major-General, her father, did not assert itself. There is no disrespect in saying that, to this state of existence, the Major-General was quite irrelevant. He would have been the first to avouch that such a tom-fool country, where neither the British tables of measurement nor even the metrical system were valid, was a place which he had never visited and had no desire to visit. If philosophers deposed that such a place existed; that, indeed, it was God's Own Country; that, moreover, such human beings as the bhikshu, the neo-platonist, the saint, the poet, the child, and the lover—and possibly the epileptic and the drunkard and the idiot—were able sometimes to linger on its frontiers, well, all he could say was that, when they returned to the realms of sense again, he would be prepared to renew pourparlers with them, and to negotiate on the principles of British Justice. “For if ever there was a three-dimensional person, it's dear old General Daubeny,” thought Tony, and would have said as much to Honor, could she have

understood him ; since, in his fondness for decorating himself with these blinding metaphysical terms, he was no better than his fathers.

Together on an early January day these two dwellers in eternity put their bodies in a train that would stop at Hassocks Station, and took them out when it got there, and walked them along the brisk and frosty roads, four miles or five, till they stood outside Sheep's Eye cottage, in Benfelly Lane ; at which point it may be said that the dwellers left heaven and dwelt very much in their bodies and very much in terms of time. And Wolstonbury Hill watched them from over the weald, as three hundred years before it had watched the homespun labourers, leal subjects of Elizabeth, building this cottage, and for three hundred years had watched its home-makers coming, in Stuart, Augustan and Georgian times—all of them as foolish as their forerunners, with their dreams of the perfection it would hold. Well might Wolstonbury, had it not been too near an eternal thing to know the weakness of emotion, have lifted an eyebrow, as it watched to-day the gentles impropriating Sheep's Eye and bringing to it no more wisdom than the churls who had gone before. But Wolstonbury rose against the sky, its surface as smooth as a sphere and its line a perfect arc.

The General became relevant again when, at the end of the holiday, Tony drifted down to the hard earth and the General's study—like Browning's angel into the cell of the boy Theocrite—and begged once more that he might be openly engaged to Honor.

"*What ?* . . . Damn, you're not still harping on that, are you ?" the General ejaculated, with that angry thrust of his mouth to one side. "Engaged to Honor ? Good God, no. Haven't you got shut of that fancy yet ?" He seemed angry that they had not doffed the idea, like the fancy dress of a single night. "No, I won't hear of it. That's enough." It wasn't worth leaving his chair for, or running up his eyeglass to, in salute.

"I am quite sure, sir"—Tony always found himself adopting this formal mode when he stepped into the rather enjoyable pomps of a suitor's audience—"that I love Honor and always shall, and that therefore I want to marry her ; and that she loves me. That's all I know."

"And how often have you been sure of that before, when you've spent a few weeks with a pretty girl ?"

"Never, sir. Never once before. When I was sixteen, I

was attracted by a little girl, but I half knew all the time that it was a transient thing. I do not feel that with Honor."

"Then," the General laughed, "that's all the more reason why you shouldn't tie yourself up to the first pretty girl who throws you off your balance. I had many such attacks before I settled down. Bless my soul, I began at school: I had some idea of marrying the doctor's daughter, and, as far as I remember, she was quite ready. Honor isn't going to marry the first good-looking youth who stirs her fancy. . . . That's the whole trouble, nothing more and nothing less, that you're both good-looking children."

"Well, I don't know about that in my case," Tony demurred, "but of course it's true of Honor. But isn't it always the beginning of the trouble, sir? After all, the highest love is only sublimated sex."

"Is only *what*?" The General's mouth shot to one side.

To explain his meaning briefly to a completely virgin mind was not easy, and Tony looked towards the window for help. But inasmuch as on the subject of these Viennese doctrines, now first percolating into England, he had lately been enjoying supper-to-midnight discussions with a long-haired master at Stratton Lye, he was able to find some words.

"I don't think that it makes love any the less glorious, sir, but rather more so, to think that men have raised out of their natural procreative instincts the loveliest thing in the world, and the solution of nearly all their frustrations. I mean to say, the rose isn't any the less beautiful, or any the less a striking evidence for theism, because it has its roots in the earth."

The General had stared at him during these propositions, as if he were staring at them rather than at him; and he did not remove his gaze for some time. Then he said:

"Well, I don't know what all that flummery's about, and I'm sure I'm content not to. But to come down to brass tacks"—the General's language always ran, sooner or later, on to familiar tram-lines—"my own opinion is that you and Honor, in spite of all your fine talk, are more than usually innocent and simple. Now, if it were Jill, there might be more in it."

"More in it!" Tony reiterated, in potent bitterness. "More in it, my heavens! . . . Forgive me, sir; but how can you know?"

"The whole thing's too quick, by a long chalk. Too quick."

"Quick! What have quickness or slowness to do with real love? They are irrelevant terms."

"Irrelevant? Damn! Why?"

Now at last the General had put up his monocle.

"Because love, if it's the real thing, lifts itself above our spatio-temporal order."

"Good God!" said the Colonel, and stared—bedazzled.

"Ask Honor what *she* thinks," suggested Tony, anxious to be helpful.

"I shall not ask her. Of course she'd say she'd either marry you or go into a nunnery; and after being given an opportunity to say it, she'd begin to believe it. And I shan't forbid her to see you, or take her round the world, or any tommy-nonsense like that; which would only convince her that she was dying with love for you. I'll have no stagy scenes with her or with you." He opened his eye-cavity, and scattered the monocle and all such scenes with it. "That's the end of it."

Tony's cheeks heated.

"But supposing, sir, that's not the end of it?"

"Eh what? Whad'd'you mean?"

Tony, who was sitting near the table, fiddled with some papers on it, and tossed them down again.

"Honor and I don't want to do anything without your consent, sir. We badly want your consent when we get married."

The general began to fumble for his monocle with a trembling hand: evidently one of the unpleasant scenes which he had scattered with it would have to be recovered.

"*When* we get married! God! . . . *When* we get married! Which you won't do, O'Grogan. What are you thinking of? Are you going to Gretna Green in a post-chaise? Are you going to live on air? Pfoo!"—the monocle was now "standing to"—"Don't oblige me to get angry with you, my boy; I've tried to deal with you gently over this affair. I've welcomed you to my home the same as ever and I expect you to justify my trust in you——"

"I warned you not to trust me, sir."

"What? Whad'd'you mean?"

"I told you, sir, four months ago, that if you allowed me to see Honor, I couldn't pretend that I wouldn't treat her as the girl who had given a definite promise to marry me. As soon as

I can **make** a home for her, I shall feel justified in taking advantage of her promise."

"Oh!" It was a good sarcastic "Oh!" as round and damaging as the staring monocle. And after delivering it, the General rose, shook down his trousers, and dusted them. "That's a declaration of war, is it?"

"If you like to put it so dramatically——"

"Dramatically! Ha! the pup accuses me of drama. Which of all things I am most anxious to avoid. . . . So you would snatch her, would you?"

"I suppose I shall have to, sir."

"Very good. Very good." The General was now standing against the fireplace. His chest lifted a little, and his shoulders adjusted themselves. Magnificently calm, he dispensed with the monocle, being above such adventitious aids. "Well, the opening of hostilities gives *me* advantages as well as you. It frees you to talk very big like this, and it frees me to say what friendliness forbade me to say before; and that is, that if you wait till you are in a position to make a home for Honor, you'll wait quite long enough to suit my book. It may interest you to know that I have spoken with your mother and your uncle, Archdeacon Gabriel, and I understand your circumstances pretty well. Now it is fortunate that you go back so soon to your schoolboys, because it relieves me from the unpleasantness of forbidding you my house. When you return, I daresay you will come and see me as usual; in three months, this little scene will seem very absurd, if, indeed, we haven't forgotten it."

Tony moved towards the door, halted as if to say something, and moved on again. All he could find to say as he opened the door was: "I am more serious than you think, sir."

"You are," the General laughed. "Painfully serious. But it gets better."

General Daubeney was pleased with his strategy, and doubtless it would have been the wisest, if based on a right estimate of his opponent's character; but on this matter his Intelligence was bringing him the most mistaken information. It was mistaken too in the weight it allowed to the loyalty, the timidity, and the decorum of Honor, his daughter. Loyalty, timidity, and decorum were all in Honor, and, despite her romantic utterance

about "nothing desperate or dangerous ever happening in Chiswick," were more natural to her than their opposites; she had been frightened when Tony once mooted the question of a secret marriage; but she was more frightened—this was what the General did not know—by the suffering which appeared in Tony's face if, by word or action, she seemed less than the heroic lover he wanted. He could always win her to his will by the way his eyes roamed unhappily abroad when he was disappointed in her.

And Tony was more offended by the General's humorous toleration than he would have been by his violent obstruction. For a second time he went back to Stratton Lye with teeth set, and with teeth set took his classes, and with teeth set acquired a five years' lease of Sheep's Eye, as from the twenty-fifth of March. With an untrembling voice he announced to Mr. Sugden that he would move into his new home before the Summer term. With the same purposeful air he set a jobbing gardener to dig in the vegetable patches of Sheep's Eye and prepare them for grass.

Very pleasant was it, perhaps more serenely pleasant than anything he had ever known, to mount his cycle on fine evenings when the spring was stirring and see how the new grass seeds were germinating or the old shrubs breaking. Easter fell in April's first week that year of 1912, and Mr. Sugden had asked him to give a fortnight of the holiday to Stratton Lye that he might coach some scholarship boys who were remaining at the school for that period. This suited him well: it put new money into his pocket and gave him the long April afternoons for work in his garden—warm, wet spring afternoons when grass really grows and creepers and flowers and shrubs really break and bloom. To-day the clematis montana would be just so much greener than yesterday, and the leaves of the jessamine quite noticeably larger; and see! the big plum tree, had all its white finery on, and stood against the dark bareness of Thatcher's Spinney like a splash and a stippling of Chinese white.

One afternoon, seeking a pleasant titillation, he trailed his hand down the leaves of the box-tree which the last tenant had cut into the shape of a cone; and he started back as he heard a flutter inside. With a lovely swoop and rise a frightened thrush flew out and sped away into Thatcher's Spinney.

"Hallo!" said Tony; and he parted the leaves and peeped in. Yes, here was her nest with the blue eggs resting in the

smooth lining of clay and its little festoon of berberis round the brim for decoration and good cheer. "Well now, isn't that nice of her!" he thought, surprised how flattered and grateful he could feel that she had chosen his box-tree for her nest.

With the falling of dusk he would cycle back to his supper at Stratton Lye, delighting in the young, innocent greenery of the roadside hedges, and in the light emerald of the larches down in the woodlands; for his eyes had been touched to a keener and more affectionate sight by the fingers of his own garden. And in his bedroom under the tiles, if he heard the rain pattering down at night, or saw the sun bright in the morning, he rejoiced in both, for both swung his thoughts to his distant garden and showed the rich earth drinking the water or the grass straining upwards under the sun.

CHAPTER VII

THE ISSUE

ALATE April day, and Sheep's Eye Cottage waited. In its every room a fire waited, tossing its flames about and playing a game of leaping lights and dancing shadows on the whitewashed walls. The flames, when stronger than the daylight, threw on floor and wall the shadows of the simple furniture that Tony, in his steadfast, untrembling deliberateness, had bought in Hurst or had caused to be made by an old carpenter in Albourne Green. To left and right swung the flames, in the draught from the wide-open windows and doors; to and fro swung the shadow of each piece of furniture, like a compass needle. The light of the fires touched with an erubescence the folds of the dimity curtains that Honor had sewn with nervous fingers. And above the roof, the smoke of the fires went up from the two chimney stacks, to tell Albourne and Twineham that the new tenants were coming into Sheep's Eye to-night.

The garden outside waited, for the young gentleman, who was renting Sheep's Eye, had come early that morning and put it in final trim, raking the earth round the shrubs, training with hammer and nail any tumbled wisp of creeper, clipping the quickset hedge, and standing well back in the roadway to see the completed picture. Beyond Sheep's Eye—but perhaps forgetful that this was the day—Hurst and Albourne, Twineham and Ansty waited, for Tony, with his calm deliberateness, had seen to it that not only a cottage and a garden should be waiting for Honor, but a circle of friends and the assurance of many interests and many diversions. After five years at Stratton Lye he had built his popularity in the houses where there were young people and tennis lawns and ping-pong boards and picnic baskets. And he had canvassed the mistresses

of them all that they should leave Honor no time for loneliness in Sheep's Eye Cottage. So good had his staff work been, while the General at Chiswick was waiting for an infatuation to perish!

There had been more than the slanting blue smoke to tell the nearer neighbours of Sheep's Eye that this was the day of its occupation, for Mrs. Fyfold, the old carpenter's wife, who was now in the cottage, ministering to the fires and preparing the tea, had told them all about her young gentleman that just now she was "doing for," and the dear young lady he would be bringing there as his wife, come tea-time on Thursday. With an anxious watching she tended those fires, determined that at the right moment they should be flaming high; and with a lively affection she prepared the "country tea" which her young gentleman had commanded with his happy laughter that "was so taking." Ever and anon she left the kitchen and, talking to herself, peeped through the living-room door, to make sure that all was right or, lifting her skirts, she climbed the stairs to the little bedroom to see that the draught was not upsetting the flower-vases or littering the place with petals and leaves. For her young gentleman himself had come early that morning and decorated both living-room and bedroom with blooms from his garden. And Mrs. Fyfold, after he had gone, had brought a handful of blooms along too.

It was sundown now, and at every sound of footsteps or wheels in Benfelly Lane, she went to the cottage door. Once it was to see the passing of the old labourer who had introduced Tony to Sheep's Eye; and he greeted her as he trudged by.

"Ev'nun, Mrs. Fyfold."

"Evening, Jo."

The labourer decided that he might halt his trudging.

"Seeing 'em in, eh?"

"Aye."

"They bayn't come yet, then?"

"No. Not yet."

"No. . . . Well, they won't be so long now, dessay."

"No. When I heard your steps I wondered was you they?"

"Noah, I'm not they." He seemed immoderately tickled by the idea. "No, noah; I bayn't they. But Sheep's Eye do be looking proper alive again, don't she?"

"Aye."

"And to think that I was by when first he set eyes on it. 'That there cottage do be empty, bayn't it?' he says to me;

and I says, 'Aye, reckon it do be purty empty.' And 'e says, 'What's her called?' and I says, 'She do be called Sheep's Eye, by rights.' 'Reckon that's the same as Shipley,' 'e says, and I says, 'Noah, Shipley do be a mile or mower from here.' 'Mebbe I could rent it,' 'e says; and I says, 'Aye, it could be rented all right, but it's no house for a gen'l'man, to my thinking.' However, he turned up again, and I know'd 'ow tud be, when I seed 'ow it was. . . . Mr. Fyfold better?"

"Yes, he's none too bad this weather."

"Well, I must be getting alone hoam, I must now. Night, Mrs. Fyfold."

"Good night, Jo."

In the train Antony O'Grogan and Mrs. O'Grogan (was it possible that Honor was Mrs. O'Grogan?) sat side by side, sometimes touching each other's hands or limbs, but not speaking much, for there was a tall man in the compartment all the way from London to Haywards Heath, who studied them rather carefully, and when they spoke it was of commonplace matters, such as the shell-pink blossom of the orchards they were passing, and the bright, stainless green of the hawthorn and the larches that broke the bare old woods with a shock of youth. But from Haywards Heath to Hassocks they were alone, and Tony took her hand in both of his and asked her: "Happy, dearest?" and she who had been rather pale throughout the journey lit up a most deliberate sparkle in her eyes and flew a smile to convince him.

Only one suit-case was on the rack, and in it were enough of Honor's garments for a night or two, no more; the rest waited at the mercy of her parents. Before the day was much darker her parents would know of the wedding: a letter signed "Antony and Honor O'Grogan" was awaiting their return from an afternoon's visiting. Not Jill nor Peggy knew of the wedding, because Tony, though he had longed that both should be in the secret, had determined to incriminate nobody.

Hassocks. They were there; and Honor's hand was shaking a little, as her husband aided her to the platform. A car, with all the speed of indifference, drove them through the bright evening to Sheep's Eye; and only once in the cab did Tony, holding her hand, speak to her. "It was wonderful of you to do this," he said. She smiled back at him. "For *me*, by gosh!" he muttered, half to himself.

In the cottage porch Mrs. Fyfold stood to welcome them.

Of the garden, the living room, and the bedroom, all lively with flowers, Honor could find but one thing to say: "O Tony, it's perfect!" Then when they were about to sit down to tea, Mrs. Fyfold looked from one to the other, and much to her own surprise, was moved to utterance.

"Well, there now! . . ." she began, and glanced again from Tony to Honor, while she fumbled in her apron-pocket for a handkerchief with which to dab at her eyes and her nostrils. "Well, there now! Forgive an old woman, but—you've fair upset me—you do be two pretty young things, and no mistake . . . and may I say as my heart is with you, my dears—and I wish you well from the bottom of me heart, I do now. . . ." She patted her eyes. "Well, it's a great day for you, a'nt it?—you must excuse me because you've properly upset me: I never thought I should take on like this. . . . There, sit down and have your tea, and don't take no notice of me—but perhaps, miss, you'd let me give you a kiss first, just to show you what I can't say very well—will you? . . . Oh thank you, my dear!"—this was as Honor came laughingly into her embrace, and returned it—"well there, well there. . . . God bless you. I can't say more than that, can I? God be good to you. . . ."

It was dark when Mrs. Fyfold came to bid them good night, and the same fond interest was in her eyes.

"I just come along to say good night, sir. Good night, miss. I'll be round early in the morning, and don't you worry about nothing. It's a real pleasure for me to be doing for you at a time like this. Just you think of nothing but your two selves, and if there's any little odd job Mr. Fyfold can do for you in the morning, just you let him know. He's proper interested in your home, and he's handy in his way. Good night, sir. . . . Thanks, I know my way out right enough. You stay with the young lady. Good night, miss, and God bless you."

The darkness fell deeper, and Tony, taking the lamp, led Honor up to the little bedroom. There he watched her as she undid her leather belt and took off her blouse of lawn and lace and her skirt, and stood before the dressing-table in her *moirée* petticoat and a petticoat-bodice of white nainsook and lace, from whose short sleeves her long bare arms reached up to unpin her hair. The long amber hair fell down her back; and drawing up a chair, she sat before the mirror to comb and brush it. Then Tony who had been sitting on the bed, got up and

came towards her and took the brush without a word from her hand, and brushed the hair, and felt its surface with his hand—as a man might tend and polish a possession long coveted and lately won. And suddenly the swelling of his love overpowered him, and he flung himself on his knees at her side, and buried his head in her lap. She stroked his hair and kissed the nape of his neck ; and he, lifting up his face to hers in a worship so still as to be almost unseeing, took her kisses on his mouth and forehead. Desire was less urgent than worship when he fumbled with his fingers at the button of her white bodice and exposed her breasts, whereover he passed his lips, then resting his cheek against them. And with both hands she pressed his head against them.

PART V

CHAPTER I

TWO YEARS AFTER

IT was a Saturday in the early July of 1914, and the household of General Daubeney was arraying itself for happiness. From base to roof the red house on the Mall had completed the dressing of its less important rooms: their linen was stiff and glistening from the hot-air cupboard, and perhaps a trifle self-conscious about its freshness; their doors were ajar like ears that listened for sounds below; and their windows were open and gaping into the Mall, like foolish and happy mouths. The most important member, the dining-room, was not yet fully attired; its door was resolutely, even rudely, shut, and one could understand an apprehension in the other rooms lest it were late for the festivities. The kitchen was fussed and fashed; everywhere its populace was in excess of its legal accommodation; there were more saucepans on its range than had any right to be there, and too much crockery, canisters, castors and cutlery on its table; and certainly too many feet on its linoleum.

And all this because Miss Joyce (or young Mrs. Len, as the cook called her) was home from India after three years' absence, with her baby and its fat brown smiling ayah. A gathering of the clans was afoot: Mrs. O'Grogan was already in the drawing-room with the General and Mrs. Daubeney and Joyce herself; Derek and Keatings would arrive as soon as their London offices released them; Peggy and Michael Saffery would appear next, in the Vicar's car, from Southend; the six Gabriels were coming; and lastly, Honor and Antony O'Grogan, hot-foot from Sussex. Seventeen would sit down to dinner.

In the drawing-room over emptied tea-cups, Joyce, radiant with her excitement, was talking so disastrously fast that her sentences, like children crowding out of school, shouldered one another aside, and the little ones were knocked over and

forgotten, and only the strongest ran straight and true to their full-stop ; and meanwhile the three parents listened and loved, and Jill Daubeney leaned forward admiringly.

"Oh, but we mustn't let the talk beat everlastingly around that wretched child," said Joyce, alluding to Antony Leonard whom the ayah had removed upstairs for his bath, "because it gets—but I *am* glad that I got in with him first—before Peggy got in with hers—because it means that my boy's the first of the new generation—Peggy was so beastly slow about getting busy—but I couldn't have done it more promptly, could I ?"

"No," the General agreed, who was sitting forward on a stiff chair, his fingers spread on the knees of his smart shepherd's-plaid trousers, and his monocle aloft and addressed towards his daughter-in-law. "Dammit, no ! The blighter got himself gazetted at the earliest possible moment."

"Yes, he couldn't have got through Sandhurst quicker," acknowledged Joyce, delightedly ; and the General looked a thought uncomfortable that she should have developed his little parable thus. But he only gave the sharp, nervous nod that was growing on him as he got older.

And now Jill entered the conversation.

"But why did you call him *Antony* Leonard ? You never told us."

"Leonard for your family, Antony for mine."

"Yes, but why Antony, when Keatings was his godfather ?"

"Oh, I don't know. I think we were all rather fond of Tony. I could never understand why Peggy didn't call hers after Tony, instead of 'Michael Derek,' because Tony was always her favourite. And fancy calling anyone after Derek !"

Mrs. O'Grogan, sad and withdrawn as ever, here broke her silence. "I think she called him Michael Derek because she felt Derek was getting left out in the cold."

"Oh !" Joyce shrieked. "Isn't that Peggy all over ? And I suppose Derek's being an appallingly pompous and high-principled godfather—he's rather enchanting in his way—but what about Honor and Tony ? They ought to give us something soon now—how dreadfully slow all these people are !—oh, but wasn't it wonderful about Tony and Honor ? I was thrilled when I heard it. Tony *would* be the only one of us to elope and do something original."

The General, with another nervous motion that was growing on him, lifted his chin and shot his lips forward for a second.

"Is a run-away marriage original?"

"Now don't pretend you're still angry with them, because we all know you're not," Joyce teased. "We know you forgave them long ago."

"It's a principle of the army that one always forgives success. When we saw that he was going to make a success of the marriage, we decided that we must overlook a technical breach of orders——"

"Who's 'we'?" This was from his daughter Jill.

"Eh, what?" He swung round to Jill and away again.

"And I must say that at the Court Martial young Jill here proved a most eloquent Prisoner's Friend. And, as it's turned out, the marriage has been the making of Tony. He's——"

"Stuff!" This from Jill again. "Tony didn't need any making."

"Of course he did! He was rather a feckless Irish boy, wanting to write poetry, before—and with no sense of affairs at all——"

"Pooh!" Jill scoffed.

"—But when he found himself saddled with a wife and a house, he buckled to, working at his school all day and reading for a London degree at night——"

"Which he shouldn't have done," said Jill. "He should have gone on with his writing."

"And starved in the future, I suppose?" The General turned on her sharply.

"They had enough to live quietly," Jill retorted, almost passionately. "They should have done the heroic thing, instead of tamely bidding for security——"

"That's some of Tony's thunder," the General explained with a laugh to Joyce. "Jill has always stolen it."

"Well"—Mrs. Daubeney was breaking in—"I think he showed up awfully well. He's made her wonderfully happy, with lots of friends, and as Daddy says, he's slaved like a nigger. And now you really must excuse me, because I'm getting jumpy about the dinner and the dining-room table."

And she disappeared.

Joyce returned to the subject of Honor and Tony.

"And do they still love each other as romantically as at first?"

To which the General, who, like so many of his kind, had given the long, hot hours of his Indian days to a camp-bed and the lightest of novels, and was therefore as romantic, when

it came to other people's love, as any housemaid, replied very deliberately :

"He has eyes for no one else."

"How nice!" said Joyce inadequately—and at that moment Keatings and Derek were shown into the room.

Both were in evening dress, and feminine eyes saw at once that Keatings's jacket was shiny and wrinkled, while Derek's was a tailor's masterpiece. Joyce jumped up from her chair, ran to her eldest brother, seized both his hands, cried: "My one and only Keatings!" and kissed both his cheeks.

"Save us!" Keatings grinned. "You usedn't to be so demonstrative. . . ."

"O Keatings, it's—it's—well, it *is*, really! I had to go to the other end of the world to learn that I was quite fond of you all. I'd never supposed that I really liked you like that. I simply loved your cable when the kid was born. It was the best of all my cables. Do you know, I nearly wept when I got it! Sloppy of me, wasn't it?"

The General, who had risen for the irruption and was examining it through his monocle, demanded what the cable had said.

"Oh, you wouldn't understand. Nobody'd understand. Only the Family—isn't that so, Keatings?"

"But what was it? Damn, what was it?"

"Oh, it just said: 'One more jar for the Gabriels;' and I cried over it—away out there in my outpost of empire. There! I've told the truth: I *did* cry. I cried all over the kid. Now why should a stupid remark like that make me cry?"

"You can search me," said Keatings, in despair of an answer.

Joyce had now gone to her second brother and kissed him, but more diffidently.

"And Derek! Funny old Derek. I got quite fond of you, too, when the monsoons were about and the mosquitoes. I realized you were all I'd got. Are you a millionaire yet?"

"Not doing too badly," Derek grinned.

"Badly!" grunted Keatings. "He's a blooming partner now. A motor magnate."

"Oh, are you really, Derek? Then won't you give me a car to take back to India. *Do*."

"You won't go back to India," said Derek significantly.

His words and manner were strange; and Joyce dropped her hands from his elbows.

"Won't go back? What do you mean?"

"You won't be able to *get* back for many years."

"Derek! I'm going back to my lord and master in six months. Nothing less than the end of the world'll stop me."

"Something very like the end of the world is going to stop you."

"Keatings, what's he talking about? Oh, isn't he maddeningly mysterious? Derek, you haven't changed a bit. What *do* you mean?"

"He's got some donkey's notion that all Europe's going to war in a month's time," Keatings explained, with fraternal shame. "He heard it to-night, and he's very proud of it."

"Father, do you hear that?" Joyce had turned to the General. "Derek says Europe's going to war next month."

"War? Good God!" exclaimed the General, fumbling for the monocle which he had abandoned.

"Oh, let's sit down and hear all about it," suggested Joyce. "It sounds rather jolly. Sit down, all. Now, Derek darling, what is it?"

Derek, sitting straight in a high-backed chair, told to an attentive audience—attentive all, except Keatings, who had heard the whole in the road and now stared with impatience and shame at the pictures in the room or at his shoes—of a rumour current in the city that Germany was hatching a plot on the Austrian frontier to establish a *casus belli* with Serbia, Russia and France, and that Great Britain was secretly reaffirming her engagements to France. "So, if the trail fires," he concluded, "we've booked a nice place for the explosion. In other words, if none of the powder proves to be damp, all Europe will be at war in a month."

The silence that met his silence was like a wide mirror staring at him.

Jill Daubeney knocked it to pieces.

"I don't believe a word of it."

"No sensible person would," Keatings endorsed.

"My dear boy." The General, removing the monocle from the subject as if it were no longer worthy of his scrutiny, supported them. "I've heard that story at regular intervals for forty years—ever since 'seventy."

"Of course," breathed Keatings.

And Joyce added: "Well, anyhow, Len's the only soldier

among you, and he's in India, so it won't affect him. And now I wish Peggy and her parson'd come. I want to show them Antony Leonard."

But the six Gabriels came next ; all together, so that Keatings, standing back, murmured to Joyce : " Lord ! what a crowd ! We must hold together." One by one the Gabriels presented themselves to the Daubeney family, who were now in their dinner dress ; first, Mrs. Gabriel, large and full, and quite unaware that she was a rather stupid woman married to a clever husband ; then the Archdeacon, tall and well-fleshed, silk-vested and silk-voiced, with all that feminine graciousness with which the Church often overlays a natural masculine aggressiveness, thereby producing a faint aroma of insincerity—which was so offensive to Keatings that he started Joyce's giggles by muttering something about a hermaphrodite ; then Elsa and Theresa, less dowdy than one might have expected and desired, but faintly wrong to a sensitive observer, none the less, since their dresses were neither wholly of the world nor wholly of God ; then the Rev. Warner Gabriel, who had, in truth, much of his father's good looks but possessed also a retreating chin—which was lucky for Keatings, who muttered to his sister : " God ! He looks like a chicken trying to cough up a seed ; " and then John Gabriel, but he, unfortunately, was every inch a man.

The Archdeacon being fluent, and Mrs. Gabriel not less so, the three O'Grogans—Keatings, Joyce and Derek—were driven from the field of conversation and into one another's companionship ; and Keatings whispered to Joyce : " Never mind ; we shall have reinforcements when Peggy and Tony come. We'll flatten them out then. Meantime they're an entertaining study."

Peggy and Michael Saffery arrived at half-past six ; Tony and Honor half an hour later ; and the O'Grogan tide, now at the full, lapped for a polite minute at the Gabriels, and then turned to beat round Joyce, the heroine of the evening ; and in the midst of its lively play, Keatings was able, with whisperings, to outline the Family's campaign : " This is the scheme, children : whenever the Gabriels get on top of the conversation at dinner, I shall cough twice, and that'll be a signal for the O'Grogans to talk at the tops of their voices about something—doesn't matter what—about snowdrops if you like—but to talk like the deuce and drown 'em. This is Joyce's show, and

Joyce is Us, not Them. Honor, you're an O'Grogan; you're on our side."

"Rather!" whispered Honor, with a skip.

"And Jill too!" Jill herself claimed. "Jill's your ally."

"Of course you are," said Tony, putting his arm round this allied waist and squeezing it, in formal confirmation of the claim.

Dinner was announced; and as the seventeen people entered the dining-room, there rose a clamour of congratulations to Mrs. Daubeney for her decorating of the table. "Tables," she corrected; and they saw that two tables, end to end, were hidden under the lake of white linen. In the centre was a pyramid of fruit; chains of artificial ivy leaves meandered among the dishes of sweets and almonds, and the crossed crackers; everywhere fairy lamps sparkled like jewels; and from the electric chandelier that hung over the centre, streamers of Christmas tree tinsel dropped to the four corners, giving to the whole table-top the likeness of a basket of good things.

"It's like Peter's cloth let down from Heaven," the Archdeacon commented. "But are Christmas decorations wholly seasonable in the Trinity season?"

("J'ever hear such a fool?" murmured Keatings.)

"Not so unseasonable as they may appear," Mrs. Daubeney laughed. "Joyce will recognize them: they are those that have decorated her Christmas table ever since she could remember. Mrs. O'Grogan has kept them all these years."

"Darling old mother!" said Joyce.

"And Mrs. O'Grogan is going to take the foot of the table, while I take the head," the General ordered. "This dinner symbolizes the union of the two clans. It symbolizes it damn well, as a matter of fact, because there's not a little of the O'Grogan crockery and cutlery united to ours."

"There's a fellow upstairs who symbolizes it better," suggested the Archdeacon, as all with noisy chatter found their places and sat in them. "Your Antony Leonard, Joyce dear. You ought to have put him, sleeping in his crib, in the centre of the table, as the *pièce de résistance* of the decorations—" ("J'ever hear such damned rot?" muttered Keatings. "The man's a babbler")—or perhaps he ought to have presided. Yes, that's better; he ought to have presided where you are, General. He's much more important than we are, because he's

got all his life in front of him. But there he is, asleep upstairs——”

Most clearly Keatings coughed twice.

Joyce leapt to the call. She had nothing to say, but she said the first thing that came into her head. “I’ve a great scheme,” she cried. “Keatings shall marry Jill. Why he hasn’t done it before I can’t imagine. Then the dove-tailing’ll be a perfect artistic whole. Three O’Grogans married to three Daubenys. Of course I don’t suppose Jill wants him for a minute, but she ought to sacrifice herself in the cause of art. Pass those almonds. Derek’ll be left without a Daubeny, but then he always did travel on his own, didn’t you, old dear? Oh, and we must make Antony Leonard an Honorary Foof.”

“Honorary! He’s a Foof by right of birth,” shouted Peggy.

“What on earth’s an Honorary Foof?” begged the Archdeacon.

“An Honorary Freeman of the O’Grogan Family,” Keatings explained.

This introduced ten minutes of bantering, full of quips and allusions which were unintelligible to the Gabriels; and Tony, who was sitting next to Jill Daubeny, decided that he could leave the victorious field and plunge, as he always loved to do, into an engrossing talk with her. Before the soup was cleared away they were deep in the things that interested them; they spoke of books they had lately read, and of books that Tony ought to write; of homes they would like to build and how they would furnish them; of travel routes they had mapped, and of ideal holidays; and in such thrilling talk both lost consciousness of the food on their forks and the wine in their glasses and the loud chatter around them. A sudden nudge at his elbow awoke Tony to the knowledge that the Archdeacon’s voice had lately been booming, with effective flank support from Mrs. Gabriel, and that Keatings had coughed a second time. He jumped with the first thing handy to the Family’s rescue.

“What’s all this talk of yours about war in a month, Derek? Jill’s just been telling me about it.”

“Yes, tell us the latest news from the city, Derek,” Peggy shouted.

“War?” called Keatings. “Civil war in Ireland do you mean?”

“Not Ireland,” Derek laughed. “The troubles in Ireland’ll

be forgotten in a day when we find ourselves facing half Europe——”

The table was Derek's ; handed to him by Tony. He gave the Great Rumour at considerable length. He substantiated it from personal experience. He declared that the Motor Industry was feeling the first breath of a storm that would blow them great good, for Russia and France were inviting tenders for tractors and lorries and motor pontoons and aeroplanes and Heaven knew what. His own firm, he said, had undercut an American firm, to capture a large French contract, and though they would be selling at cost price, it was worth it, for they would then have their footing with their clients and when war started, there would be no quibbling about prices. He told them that his firm had already begun the designing of new aeroplane engines and of low-g geared lorries for heavy ground, in case the war went on for years.

It was a useful effort in the Family's behalf ; and before the Archdeacon could be delivered of some sentiments on the morality of making money which was the price of blood, Keatings got hold of the ball and proved by a series of syllogisms that his brother had been talking like a fool.

This skirmish successfully achieved, Tony fell to talking with Jill again, and heard little of anyone else's voice till one sentence detached itself from the uproar. Mrs. Gabriel was speaking to Honor diagonally across the table.

“ So you're very happy, I hear, Honor,” she was saying.

“ Rather ! ” Honor answered ; and no one could doubt that she meant it.

Tony, breaking from the talk with Jill, looked quickly at his wife ; and Jill, surprised at so sudden a movement and at his momentary departure into remoteness, looked up at his profile. He appeared to feel her glance on his cheek, and at once returned to their laughing talk.

And now the General was on his feet, a fact they were welcoming, since he seemed about to make a speech, with cheers and clapping and a hammering of spoons on the table. Joyce cried : “ What-what. Damn-damn.” The Archdeacon leaned back in his chair, fingered his glass and beamed at his host. Father Michael, anticipating a toast, refilled his glass. Peggy chose a banana, as her refreshment during the speech. And Jill and Honor gazed down in embarrassment at their plates

and refused to face the world, as most female relatives do when one of their men embarks upon an after-dinner speech.

"I think," said the General, "that before we break up, someone ought to give a sort of—shall we say—official welcome to our daughter Joyce—for she *is* the daughter of both our families—which, as the padre said, she has been the first to unite for ever in her young scamp upstairs—and *he's* a Sahib, I can assure you!—and it's her coming home that has been the—the *casus belli* of this muster; so we shall want to drink her health and the health of the young Turk upstairs" (Humorous *Hear, bears* and '*Ear, 'ears* from various parts of the table), "and since we are talking of *casus bellies*——"

"But are we?" interrupted Joyce, obliging the speaker to turn towards her and ask:

"What-what?" before he could continue:

"Since we are talking of *casus bellies*, it's occurred to me that if young Derek should ever be right and England should need all her sons to defend her—well, now——" He put up his monocle and surveyed the table—"I see before me Keith, Derek and Antony O'Grogan——"

"Who are Irish," reminded Tony, to keep humour, which was threatening to slip from the room, at the board.

"Eh?" snapped the General. "Irish? Yes, yes, but *loyal* Irish. Good God, yes—dammit—*loyal* Irish—not the poisonous traitors who never lose an opportunity of stabbing us in the back——"

"Hear, *bear*!" shouted the Tory Derek. "Hear, *bear*!"

"They've done it before," continued the General, thus encouraged, "and they'd do it again, if ever we went to war—you can be sure of that."

"Yes, yes," Tony soothed, and wondered if his interpolation had been helpful.

"But the loyal Irish—there've been no nobler servants of the Empire than the loyal Irish. There was Wellington. And there's Roberts now." The mention of these great names mollified him into equanimity again, and he proceeded with a smile: "And I see before me three such loyal sons of the Empire in Keith, Derek and Antony O'Grogan. I see John Gabriel, and I am reminded by Joyce's presence of my own dear boy, already a soldier; I see two excellent padres in Warner Gabriel and Mr. Saffery, and dammit! I remember *myself* who am not too old to teach the drill-book, if need be—and so I say,

that if ever England should have to defend her frontiers we could put a very honourable little company into the field."

All gave loud cheers to this, partly for the sake of being uproarious, and partly to express an affection for the good old man. Someone even tried to break into "Rule, Britannia," but it perished in the jollier business of hammering the cutlery.

"But"—began the General, when he could begin again—"but there'll be no war, you can take my word for it." The monocle, that magnificent aid to oratory, dropped. "The Germans'll wait till they've a navy equal to ours, and if they wait till then, they'll wait quite long enough to suit my book——"

Instantly Tony's thoughts shot indoors to puzzle out: "Oh, where have I heard that before? Where? Where? Was it he who said it to me, or someone else?" And soon the picture came before him: the General facing him and saying: "If you wait to marry Honor, you'll wait quite long enough to suit my book."

"However"—the General was continuing—"however, all that hasn't much to do with Joyce. Joyce, my dear, we raise our glasses to you, and to Len in his absence, and to your rapscallion upstairs."

"Joyce." They were giving the toast boisterously.

"Joyce."

"Joyce, God bless her!"

"Len."

"Len, God bless him."

"Antony Leonard."

"Antony Leonard, God forgive him."

And then they called on Joyce for a reply; and Joyce, turning quite red, enjoined them: "Don't be idiots! How on earth could I make a speech?" but they persisted in their clamour, and at last, to a terrific hammering on the table, she half rose and said: "Thanks frightfully for what Father said. And now my idea is that when dinner's over, we all dance." "Yes, yes!" "Hear, hear," came the cries; and Joyce, forgetting that she was formally acknowledging a toast, explained the plan with volubility, gradually degenerating from a standing to a seated position. "Yes, do let's! We'll dance in the drawing-room and out in the hall. Someone'll strum on the piano. So come along as soon as possible. I want to dance. We can only be young once, and I'm beginning to feel frightfully old—I've passed thirty, do you realize it, family?—it's a shocking

thought—and as the end draws nearer, I begin to see more and more that nothing matters in the world but palliness and kindnesses”—this irrelevant and unexpected moral drew loud laughter and the statement that the wine had got into her head, which she readily allowed. “Yes, I’m sure it has. I began to suspect it some time ago. But come along, do; cut your smokes and your gunpowder talk as short as possible, won’t you?”—the ladies were rising—“I give you ten minutes. You’ve got to come, all you boys, when you hear the music start.”

In a quarter of an hour the loud, imperious playing of Mrs. Daubeny summoned the men to their attendance; and the dancing began. The General partnered Mrs. O’Grogan; the Archdeacon twinkled his gaitered feet in and out of Joyce’s flying shoes; Tony seized his wife with a preference so marked that it enchanted that houseful of romantics; Warner Gabriel bowed before Peggy and led her into a restrained, clerical waltz; Father Saffery, quite untroubled by clerical dubiety, captured Jill Daubeny with a promptitude that annoyed both Keatings and Tony; Derek, obeying his lofty conceptions of duty, took Theresa Gabriel and danced with her an unadventurous measure; John Gabriel took his sister Elsa; and Keatings, left with Mrs. Gabriel, embraced her firm and weighty mass with great gallantry, and directed it with great skill. From the drawing-room into the hall and back again the couples waltzed, with a communal singing of the waltz’s air, not all of it in tune; with collisions in the doorway, some of which were less accidental than deliberate; and with insistent, rhythmic yells for the tune’s continuance, when Mrs. Daubeny’s hands fell exhausted to her lap and her head bowed collapsingly over the keys.

Mrs. Gabriel took the piano. And Father Saffery shouted to Tony: “It’s not fair that you should monopolize your wife all the time. Let us old men have a treat sometimes,” and abducted her straight away; the other couples reshuffled themselves in the *mêlée*; and once more a driving, swirling and bruising (so Joyce complained) but impenitent scrimmage filled the house with its screams and laughter. The servants came to the top of the basement stairs to watch.

In the third dance Peggy, defying the proprieties, came to

Tony, took his hand, and announced that he was her partner ; and as they swam together into the vortex, she bewailed : " I hardly ever see anything of you. It's a year since we met."

" Too busy," he grinned. " Hard work."

" Don't you ever write now ? "

" No. No, there's oceans of time."

Peggy danced several steps without speaking.

" Tony : may I say something ? It's quite nice."

" Why not ? "

" Tony : I've long wanted to say"—it was apparently difficult to say, for she sent her eyes adrift—" that—just that I'm so terribly glad that you're happy. Yours was what every marriage ought to be, wasn't it ? If you've got what you've got, you've got everything."

She gave her eyes to him again, and he smiled into them gratefully.

" Yes."

" Of course Joyce is happy, I think," Peggy went on. " But then she *would* be. . . . But I was a little afraid for you, Tony. I was afraid you'd either be unutterably happy—or the other thing. . . . And you're happy ! I'm thrilled about it."

" Thank you."

" And Honor's a darling," she added.

" She is," said Tony simply.

" Tony : why have you never asked me to stay with you in your cottage ? I'm cut to the quick about it. You've had Mother and Keatings, but never me once."

This protest she had sent along a direct, steady, but merry glance ; and that merry glance melted into a second's bewilderment, as it trapped a frightened look on Tony's face—a look which had passed quickly into brightness again. It was like a ripple which shudders, half seen and half imagined, over a sheet of water, when a whisper of visiting wind has disturbed the still and sunny day.

" You shall come at the end of July," he laughed, " when the school breaks up. I'll take the first week of August as a holiday."

And then that dance ended.

It was not likely that such strenuous dancing would long be maintained among brothers and sisters and husbands and wives ; and Charades supplanted it. The older generation retired to a row of chairs, and the younger to the wardrobes

and the trunks upstairs. A superior fecundity in Tony's mind now lifted him to the mastership of the ceremonies; and not ten minutes of wrangling were needed before his yelled inspirations had carried their sheer merit to triumph. The Charade was to be a series of five scenes, of which the first three should enshrine a word of three syllables, and the last two a word of two. The first three scenes were to be Potted Opera, and the last two Potted Shakespeare.

The first potted opera was the opening scene of *Carmen*, in which Tony, after the custom of actor-managers, played the principal rôle himself: he was Carmen, dressed in an old red petticoat of Mrs. Daubeney's, an old-fashioned zouave jacket, a false fringe, and a red rose between his lips; and he brought down the house on his first entry. Derek was a noble Don José, in the General's sword; and all the others were soldiers or cigarette girls. The dialogue consisted almost entirely of Carmen crying: "O Don José, how I love you!" and Don José replying: "O Carmen, how I do the same!" and both, while embracing, breathing "Oh, oh, oh!" in their mutual ecstasy. It had been an audience of defectives which had not suspected "Oh" for the hidden syllable here.

Faust followed *Carmen*. Here Jill was the young Dr. Faust, wearing long stockings, bloomers for trunks, an old black coat of her mother's, and the General's sword. John Gabriel was Mephistopheles, but a black Mephisto, since the available feminine hose and bloomers were all black; and Keatings was Marguerite, in a skirt and blouse with a pillow in his chest to make a bosom, and a pillow slung behind to complete his figure. Keatings's was the triumph this time; the room rocked when Faust punched Keatings in both pillows and exclaimed: "Marguerite, how you do *grow*!" The syllable was submerged beneath the laughter and none so quick as to save it.

No scene of opera could be recalled to enshrine the third syllable, so Tony invented a fictitious opera called *The Gods and Ganymede*; and explained to a doubting audience that it was one of the lesser known works of Verdi. "Opus 358," he said. Its first act was magnificent: all the Gods and Goddesses were seen on Olympus, with Jove on the throne, in a dressing-gown, a paper crown from the crackers, and the General's sword; and Honor, in male attire and bearing a

tray, was Ganymede, the lovely Phrygian boy whom Jove had recently translated to Heaven to be his cup-bearer.

Her identification was easy, for Tony kept summoning her with the genial apostrophe: "*Gan*, dear, bring the nectar," and Honor ran to his feet with the Bass or the Guinness, which he drank as a God should drink.

Now the two Shakespearean scenes; and here in the first the secret must inevitably out, even to those who had not as yet disentangled it—such as Mrs. Gabriel and the staring General. When Viola discussing with Olivia whether her face was all God's handiwork, expostulated: "I call it a daub, anyhow," the General shouted his guess with great delight, confirmed it with a "Good God, yes! Of course!" and lowered his monocle as if his acumen had put an end to the business. But he was adjured by his daughters to shut up, or he would ruin the last scene, so he put up his monocle again to study it. It proved to be a gorgeous Eastern affair, with Honor as Cleopatra, and Antony as Antony, with the General's sword. But when Antony began to address Enobarbus as "Enny, old bird——" the scene was broken up beneath a tidal wave of laughter and applause.

"O'Grogan-Daubeny, very fine, very fine!" clapped the General.

"Very apposite, very apposite!" congratulated the Archdeacon.

"Most amusing," said Mrs. Daubeny.

And Father Saffery explained the riddle's answer to Mrs. Gabriel, and the steps by which it had been built up.

Then the Archdeacon, having heard the clock strike eleven, rose to withdraw himself and his family. To-morrow was Sunday, he said. So the Gabriels departed, and Father Saffery went with them. But the rest of the young people refused to break up. They lit a fire, not so much because the night was cold as because a fire was good fun; and they turned out the lights, and sat all around it, on sofas and cushions, and talked of their childhood.

CHAPTER II

THE RETURN

NEXT morning, after church, Tony, Honor and Peggy set off on a voyage whose inspiration and captain were Peggy. They mounted a bus in the Chiswick High Road, rushed for its front seats, captured them, and sat there, while the vehicle rattled them into King Street and the Hammer-smith Road. But not till the red-brick Gothic of St. Paul's school, creepered and mellow behind its railings and its lawns, dominated one side of the road, and the red-brick pastiche of Colet Court tried to dominate the other, did they feel that the bus was passing through a gate into the country of their exploration.

From now onward the streaming pavements and the branching side-roads were the tracks of their schooldays, and every house and shop was a friend—except these places which were offensively new. There was the old North End Road which had been one of the paths to Earl's Court Exhibition; there was Avonmore Road—did Peggy remember young Peter Brand, that ass, who lived down there. Yes, and Phyllis Maple had lived three doors further. Remember that riotous party at her house, when the Ming vase was smashed?

But how empty seemed all these roads on a Sunday. Nowhere was there a big boy in a St. Paul's cap or a small one in a Colet Court cap, who on weekdays were the very natives of the road.

Now the bus had only to go over the hump of the bridge and it would drop them at St. Austin's Road. But it sailed past their corner, and they rushed for the steps, and hurried or slipped down them, and jumped off dangerously on to the stationary road.

How quiet it was on a Sunday. Tony took Honor's arm and Peggy's arm, and directed them—rather like a policeman directing a couple of disorderly women—towards the corner.

"There! There, Honor, my dear; in a house right at the top of that long road was born the famous Tony O'Grogan and the hardly less famous Peggy O'Grogan."

They stood at the bottom, looking up the road. How small the houses looked, and surely the vista used to seem much longer. Why, to-day one could see Uxbridge Road at the top of it quite easily, and yet one's memory had suggested that Uxbridge Road, from this end, was generally lost in the mist of another world.

"Tony," Peggy pleaded: "Tony: say I'm not right in thinking that it's a little squalid."

There was no one in the road, church time being past; so Peggy was able, as they walked towards the vicarage, to rhapsodize over the coal-holes which stretched in the same old dotted line along the pavement; over the faded pink geraniums in the window-boxes; over the accumulations of blown dust which had collected in the sagging of the pavement flags and in the interstices between them; over the pillar box. And Tony was able to bewail that the front doors had now split themselves into *two* doors, so as to admit to flats and maisonnettes; that the area-doors opened into basement flats, no longer into roomy kitchens that held cooks in powder-blue cotton and parlour maids in black dresses and caps with streamers; that the "Apartments" cards were up in many a window; that a London which had been, was gone. Only ten years, and it had faded into this, as one lantern scene fades into another.

Standing in front of the vicarage, they ran their eyes from its hearth-stoned steps to its sham Corinthian portico, and the stucco balcony above, and the window above that, and the dormer window in the roof.

"Wasn't it any bigger than that, and was it really so ugly?" asked Peggy.

The door was plainly unlatched, and Peggy dared him to push it open a little further and see into the hall. He did so. All was changed: the chocolate dado and the tiled paper were gone, and the gas fixtures; only the applied leaf ornament still ran round the cornice of the ceiling.

Then the three entered the church. In the porch were the cards of the clergy with their hours for hearing confessions, and there was not one name that belonged to ten years ago. And this smell of incense was new too. They passed from the

porch to the west end, and again exclaimed in surprise that the church should be no bigger, that the clustered columns were no further apart, and the vaulted roof no higher. But if the material structure of the church had shrunk, its spiritual professions had soared. This was not the "Moderate High" Church of Dr. O'Grogan's days; it was "Catholic" of the "catholics." Six candles guarded the golden tabernacle on the altar, mosaic Stations of the Cross ran round the walls, a crucifix hung on the column opposite the pulpit, and curtained confessionals stood in the corners. "It seems almost a law that as a neighbourhood goes down the church should go up," Tony whispered to Honor—not to Peggy, for she had dropped to her knees in the nearest pew.

Steps were heard crossing the chancel, and a little cassocked man, with a white walrus moustache, passed through the sanctuary rails to the altar, where he lifted the missal and placed it on the retable.

Peggy had risen, and she exclaimed, "Tony: it's Mr. Flote. Oh, it's Mr. Flote."

They all went up to the chancel, where Peggy called, "Mr. Flote, Mr. Flote, *won't* you recognize me?"

He turned, and screwed his eyes at the intruders. Recognition opened them wide, and he came down from the altar with outstretched hands, as a diminutive and playful king might come down the steps of his throne.

"It's Miss Peggy! Miss Peggy! And Mr. Antony! Well, this is—no, go easy with that arm, dear boy—that's where my arthritis troubles me. And how are the other dear children? How's the dear boy Mr. Keith? And Miss Joyce?"

They began to answer him, but he turned to Honor.

"And is this—am I guessing right?—is this your little lady, sir? *Well!* Well, Mrs. O'Grogan—or Mrs. Antony, may I call you?—well, you've got one of the best boys, if you'll pardon my expressing an opinion. Miss Peggy here, and Mr. Antony were always the best of the dear Vicar's family, to my thinking. Not but what they were all scamps, madam. I could tell you a story or two! Well I mind Master Keith at a children's service pretending to be blind, and being led in by Master Derek, and bumping into all the other dear children, and falling over chairs and hassocks and the like. Oh, ho, ho! He sat with his eyes tight shut the whole service through, and was led out by Master Derek, bumping into everything again.

I said to him, when they come near the door and tried to bump me, I said, 'Go along with you. I wonder what your father'd say, if he saw you playing up like that. It'd be the strap, and you know it.' But I couldn't help but laugh. But come downstairs and I'll make you a cuppa tea. . . . O yes, you must. . . . Often enough I've made our present curates laugh with tales of those old times. Very pleasant boys they are—nice natural boys. . . . Come along. . . . This way, Mrs. Antony."

Mr. Flote went ahead of them down the narrow stairs to the vestries. He walked rather stiffly, the shoulder of his arthritis arm lifted higher than the other. "I heard all about you from Miss Joyce, who wrote to me from India. I hadn't heard nothing of any of you for years when all of a sudden a letter come from India, and I said to my daughter, I said, 'That's funny! Who wants to write to me from India?' and it was Miss Joyce's, with all the news about the dear boy she'd married, and her little one, and your and Mr. Antony's elopement, and all the like of that. I *did* take it kindly of her to remember me out there, and I sent her all the latest, though I find it hard writing nowadays, with my arm so sadly. . . ."

"Phew!" Tony broke in from the rear. "The same old smell down here. It's the only thing that hasn't changed. Honor, this smell makes me feel about five."

"Yes, it's always a shade damp down here," Mr. Flote acknowledged. I daresay that's what brings the arthritis. But I can't complain. I'm pretty perky for eighty. Come in."

His peculiar burrow, between the Clergy Vestry and the Muniment Room, was another thing that had not changed: there was the same raffish desk, the same decrepit arm-chair, the same gallery of faded and curling photographs pinned all over the wall, and the same gas stove with its drunken asbestos and its rusty iron. He lit the trivet and set the kettle on the flame. Some new photographs pinned among the others—that was the only change. Tony, running his eyes along them, chaffed him. "Flote, you haven't dusted this place in the ten years since I left you. And as you hadn't done it in the twenty years before that—hallo! what's this . . .?" He was looking at a photograph of the interior of Antwerp Cathedral. . . . "Peggy, look at this."

Peggy came up and looked over his shoulder, and Mr. Flote came too, bringing in his hand the bread-knife with which he

was cutting them some thin slices of bread and butter. He explained the card to them. "Yes, your dear father sent me that two years ago, come Christmas. You see what he wrote below, don't you?" Screwing up his eyes, he traced under the words with the point of the knife. "'To a faithful old friend. Psalm 84, and especially verse 11.' A nice, natural man, your father was."

"What's Psalm eighty-four?" asked Peggy.

"It's that there one about 'How amiable are thy dwellings thou Lord of Hosts. My soul hath a longing to enter into the courts of the Lord'—and all the like of that. . . ."

"And verse eleven?" It was Tony who asked this in a soft voice, for Peggy could not speak.

"Oh, he was always very apt-like with his quotings, wasn't he? your dear papa. It's that there one about 'a doorkeeper in the house of the Lord.' It proper moved me, I *will* say, when I looked it up, coming from a big man like he was. And see what he says on the back: oh, he was always a good speaker, he was; and he had a big heart, if I may say so—your father. He says—look here: 'I often think of you in your burrow underground, dear old friend; and sometimes I tell myself that they placed you well, those who put you down there, among the foundations of the church.'"

They stayed a little longer with Mr. Flote, drinking his tea and munching his bread and butter, while he discoursed on the changes in the church.

"The congregation isn't like what it was. It's not the same class. The collections aren't a half of what they was in your time. No, we don't see a sovereign in the plate from one year's end to another, except perhaps 'Ospital Sunday. And the Vicar's Warden is the baker in High Street—I wonder what your dear father'd have thought of that! And we never have no bishops preaching here now; except the dear Bishop of London—he comes sometimes, the dear boy. You'd hardly think it was the same church, but it *is*. I've seen some clergy come and go in my time, and they've all had their different little ideas, the new ones never reckoning much to the ones before 'em or their ways, and wanting it all different, and I've had to play up to them all, which I do, because they're all the same sort of gentlemen at the bottom—nice, natural gentlemen, for the most part."

When they rose to go, he took Honor's hand and said, "Well,

dear Mrs. Antony, I take it kindly of you to have come and looked me up, like you have. And if you'll believe me, you've picked one of the best in young Mr. Antony."

"I know I have," laughed Honor.

"And I see *he* don't regret his bachelor times. I see *he's* never been so happy before, in all his born days."

"That's about the truth, Flote," laughed Tony.

CHAPTER III

OUTSIDE THE DOOR

TONY took Honor back to Sheep's Eye the same night, because he had to go on duty at the school early the next morning. They took the latest train and when they walked up the brick path to the porch of the cottage, it was eleven o'clock of a perfect night. They entered and lit a lamp. Clean and comfortable and very pleasing seemed the little room, with its polished wood, its chintz chairs, and its whitewashed walls.

"Looks nice when you come back to it," Tony remarked.

"Sweet," agreed Honor.

She did not remove her coat, as Tony was doing, but put up her face for a good-night kiss.

"I'm tired after last night. I'm going straight to bed."

"Good night, dear." He kissed her, rather absently, and felt for his pipe.

"I shall sleep like a log, Tony. You won't wake me if you're late, will you?"

"No, my child. I'm only going to have one pipe, or two at the most. Good night."

She was gone, and soon he heard her footsteps on the floor overhead. When his pipe was lit, he opened the front door quietly and stepped on to the threshold. What a night! The whole sky from the northern woods with their tapestry trees to the long southward wave of the Downs was emptied of cloud or haze, garnished with the summer stars, and blanched with a brilliant moon. Not a leaf rustled; no owl hooted; no bird fluttered wakefully in the foliage, nor bat made a shudder in the empty air. Every wall and tree and shrub laid its shadow out of sight of the moon.

Pipe in mouth, he walked to his gate and leaned on it; and

the sound of his feet and the creak of the gate seemed a trespass on such stillness. He turned round and looked at his house. In Honor's bedroom window was a square of light, and he watched it till it blacked out. Then, hands in pockets, he began to wander round the little garden. The antirrhinums and the stocks; the shrubs so handsomely grown since first he saw them three years ago; the grass patch, a trim thing of his own creating; the country stretching away to the rise of Wolstonbury, clear against the lustred sky; and, above, the star-pageant—why had each of these things, as he looked at it, a dull blow for him? Each the same dull blow.

"God, what a fool I am!" he muttered. "Why can't I accept it? Just accept it. I'm a thousand times more fortunate than most, and know it."

He walked on till he came to the little orchard at the back. Here an apple tree which Honor and he had planted a month before their wedding, now grown well and hung with young fruit, gave him, not a dull blow, but a stab. He ridiculed himself with a dead laugh. Ha! such an old story, such a universal story, and he was making a tragedy of it! Why, people always made a comedy of it. Hadn't he any humour at all? It was no more than the matter of an old jest, everywhere accepted: that honeymoon rapture didn't last; that passion must sooner or later sink into friendship; that the lure of his wife's body must often lose its potency for him, though not, it seemed, for other men; that her little intellectual failures and feminine cowardices, which had once possessed a charm for him, could now be irritants; that she whose nearness a year or two ago was necessary for his ease and content could sometimes now give him the best quiet by her absence—"O God!" he gasped, having forgotten that it was a comedy.

That he who had once loved Honor so, should be able to desire her only seldom now, and when a physical need was upon him—if this were so, and it *was*, then he could believe no longer in the love he had hunted for. For if the love he had felt for Honor were not this thing, then he must trust no other passion that might visit him, because it could never surpass what he had felt for Honor. And this being granted, it followed that a man must ever be alone in the world—alone among good friends.

"A love that is an everlasting mutual absorption is

the only perfect thing in the world—and there is no such thing.”

Well, could he say that he accepted it? To a nature such as his what followed from acceptance? Strolling up and down and pulling at his pipe, he surveyed the whole face of the world to see the results of his acceptance; and he saw that every beautiful thing in it partook of the injury. Every beautiful landscape and evening sky would hurt, for they always stirred this sharp hunger for a perfect human love. The exquisite lines of women’s faces would hit him the same blow, for they pointed to something that wasn’t there. The curves of children’s cheeks would rejoice him for a moment, and then—remind him that they must grow up and want this thing that existed in dreams alone, and take their disappointment. All the love-lyrics, and the whole literature of love, would come with the same pain, for his heart would resist them and say, “There is no such thing.” And lastly, if there were no such thing, there was nothing to write about, for it had touched everything with its light, and the light was out.

Well, could he say, “I accept it,” and laugh? He walked to the gate and leaned his back against it, and looked up at Honor’s window. He pictured her lying asleep on the double bed, and he knew that he was very fond of her. “And you shall never know these thoughts of mine, Honor; you couldn’t understand them if you did—you’re too simple and sensible and lively. And I don’t think there’ll ever be anyone else, my dear, because I shall believe no more in any love that may try to enter.”

He knocked out the pipe on the gate, saying briskly, “I shall get used to it,” and walked back into the house. Closing the door quietly he climbed with the hall-lamp up to the room. He held the lamp above her, his palm shading the light from her face. Yes, he loved her, but a little differently—that was all. He’d be an idiot to make a tragedy of a little change like that! “It’s trite, God bless my soul!” he thought, trying a laugh.

But an irregularity in his heart rebuked the laugh and whispered, “Even a trite event can lose its triteness to him who is suffering it. The laughter is always the onlooker’s.”

“No, no,” his will answered. “It’s a comedy with a little passing pain in it. I shall get used to it. There’s nothing big in it. There’s no unfaithfulness on her part or mine—

nothing that might be a tale worthy of all this fuss ; no love turned to hate ; no life of misunderstanding and mutual degradation stretching before us ; nothing big ; in fact, there are no incidents at all—it's simply not a tale worth the telling ! ” And yet—he drove his elbow against his heart to control a pain there—and yet the meaning was gone from beauty everywhere, and all the shrines were empty.

CHAPTER IV

ON WOLSTONBURY

THE school term ended on July 29th ; and on the Friday, a the last day of the month, not Peggy alone, but Jill Daubeney as well, came driving down to Sheep's Eye, for a long week-end. Monday was August Bank Holiday. Father Michael, more attracted to Jill than Tony cared to watch, drove them down in his little black coupé, but was resolute to return to Southend the same night, where he must make his preparations against the Sunday. They alighted into Tony and Honor's joyous welcome ; and Peggy, looking up at the creepered cottage and round at the flowered garden, shot her soaring beatitudes over all, like jets from a fireman's hose.

Their talk was chiefly of their plans for the next few days. Only Father Michael was disposed to be political, and he expatiated somewhat on the Irish quarrel and the failure of the conference which the King had summoned to Buckingham Palace. Of Russia's bickering in the Near East with Austria he spoke hardly at all ; it would come to nothing, he said.

Tony was not interested in either topic. Instead, he told his plans to the three girls. "My staff has drawn up its schemes for every minute of your stay," he said. "And I promise you, you've got to get up at an early hour to-morrow. To-morrow we walk for miles and miles, and picnic on Wolstonbury."

They went out early the next morning into weather set for heat, and the four of them marched with a will, the girls in stout shoes and swinging their sticks, and Tony in shorts and an open shirt, with a rucksack slung at his shoulder blades ; not clear, as he grumbled, whether he was the colonel of the regiment or its baggage train. They walked from Albourne Green to Muddleswood, and from Muddleswood to Fulking, and so on, to the shoulder of the downs where the chain is cleft by the Adur

Valley. It was on Fulking Hill that the great view of the Weald first laid itself before them.

"Look," commanded Tony.

Peggy rewarded him with a gasp, and Jill with a silence. From the escarpment's foot all the Sussex Weald billowed away in tillage and meadow and woodland, the hedgerows crossing it in a net-work of squares and diamonds, and the tree-masses lying among them in patches of dense embroidery. All the distant North Downs, from Ide Hill in Kent to Clandon in Surrey, passed beneath the sweep of their eyes; and two great headlands came marching forward on to the weald, Black Down and Leith Hill. And round the rim of this vast basin, six other counties laid their contribution to the prospect, before they closed it in.

But Tony would not suffer the girls as yet to fix the names on the picture map before them, but led them away from it to the folds behind the Devil's Dyke; and they walked and walked, the spring in the turf putting a spring into their stride and a lightness into their hearts. The riders were out on the downs this Saturday before the August Holiday, and it was plain that their horses rejoiced also in the turf and the upland air: their hoofs pawed and their mouths strained for licence to canter or gallop; which given, they went like the wind, till they were specks on a distant crown.

The downland crowns behind the Devil's Dyke make a sea of infolding hills; and it was among these ways that Tony and his party walked—not to the Dyke itself, for the bank holiday crowds were assembling there—but by the inland route and quickly, towards the solitude of the brow above Seddlescombe, where they could look down on that toy village, nestling among its screening trees on the face of the bluff. And here they saw the view again, under an afternoon sun; and this time they drew their pleasure, not from the great expanse as a whole, but from the little individual things; they picked out Stratton Lye, and Albourne Green, and Sheep's Eye, and the twisting lanes and the straight roads; the clustered villages and the far-off spires; and the men and horses moving upon the fields.

Hotter than ever broke the Sunday, and Jill, standing with Tony in the garden and looking towards Wolstonbury, said, "she was mad for the downs again."

"I must go back, I must go back," she cried; and Tony, in an instant agreement, rushed into the house to announce that lunch would be served on Wolstonbury.

But the faces of both Peggy and Honor were doubtful and demurring; and Peggy explained at last that "she had thought of going to church;" and Honor said, "Yes, Peggy shall pray for you Sabbath breakers, and I'll stay and see that she's fed. You and Jill go, and I'll make up your lunch." So Tony, driving down a peeping sense of delight and relief, marched off with Jill, heading for the slopes of Wolstonbury.

The morning had not worn very far when the sun, now in their faces, went behind the only cloud afloat in the heavens, and by so doing, left all its downward rays clearly outlined against a primrose sky, those directly above Wolstonbury falling to its top like the lines of a visible shower. Then it emerged again and quenched all that momentary apotheosis with its brilliance; and it climbed and topped its curve before the toiling couple had topped the summit of Wolstonbury.

"Ah!" Jill sighed, as Tony flung down his rucksack, and both sank happily on to the turf. "Here I spend the afternoon. We will eat our lunch in the presence of nine counties. And then we'll just talk."

And they talked—one of those talks that drink up the hours like minutes, that raise an exhilarating glow in the head and light a tingling warmth on the cheeks and spread a strange peace in the heart. Did Tony do most of the talking? Neither knew, for the listener who perfectly understands and enthusiastically responds, especially if she is a feminine listener, enjoys as big and happy a part as the one with the words; and moreover, such talks as these do not lend themselves to measurement in terms of time. At what point Tony began with spluttering words to expound his creeds, neither ever remembered; but at some time or another he was saying:

"I've been struggling for months past with an idea which I can't put into words. I can only kind of see and feel it. But these downs always help me to see it in a picture. There are two kinds of beauty before us now, aren't there?"

"Are there?" Jill inquired, with eyebrows humorously arched.

"Yes. There's the rather luxuriant beauty down in the valley there—a matter of orchards and flowers and small

individual things, and, seen as a whole, rather lush. And then there's the graver, lonelier beauty of these bare downs—"bleaker" I suppose is the word—a matter of line and mass and shadow. We climb from one to the other. Well, I'm beginning to find the one rather finicking and personal, and the other more satisfying, just because it's spacious and impersonal and lonely. D'you understand me?"

Jill, staring ahead, nodded an affirmation. "I think I understand."

"Well, I sometimes wonder if in life we have to climb from one to the other—do you see? And perhaps this wide unindividual beauty of the downs is only a first step towards an austerer beauty still—I mean, the beauty of snowfields and glaciers, and so up and up to the completest beauty of all—which is—I dunno—something bleaker and colder than poor human minds dare imagine. That's the idea. I don't know if there's anything in it. And I'm sure you don't understand me."

"Yes, I do. I do—I think."

Tony, looking up at her profile, loved her outward-gazing eyes, so grave now, and her lips set for thought.

"I dunno," he complained. "Pushed to its furthest, the idea seems to lead to the end of our individuality . . . But sometimes I think that whenever we approach perfection, whether in our thinking or in our behaving or in our loving, we approach that end. I mean, if I think aright, I am not thinking in any way personal to myself, but according to some universal law . . . And so too, if I loved . . . I dunno. . . . It's bleak, but if it's true, we mustn't funk it; and as I say, sometimes it appeals to me as the greatest beauty. . . . Nirvana. . . . Oh, how wonderful Buddha was, and Christ! . . ."

Always the talk of youth, in its stammering earnestness, fetches up at last to Buddha and Christ.

"I think I see what you mean," Jill nodded. "A little, anyway. And I shall think about it an awful lot."

It was late afternoon now, and he clambered to his feet.

"We must be going. They'll wonder what has become of us. Come on."

Picking up Jill's hand from her lap he raised her too, sending through the significant pressure of his fingers a man's affection for the girl who will talk of the things he loves.

When they pushed open the door of the cottage they stepped

into a buzz of voices. Honor ran out to them, saying: "Mr. and Mrs. Sugden have come with extraordinary news. We were hoping you would arrive soon," and returned with them following quickly. Mr. Sugden lifted his great obelisk of a body, and even as he heard his introduction to Jill, told his young colleague that Germany had declared war on Russia and was concentrating her armies on the French and Belgian frontiers. Yes, yes, she was only waiting for France to signify her intention of supporting Russia, so that she would have the right to invade France. Good God alive, there was nothing so far as he could see, except the unprepared French armies, to stand between the magnificent German hosts and the Channel ports, and nothing but the Channel between *them* and Stratton Lye. "I'd got some German students coming over for the holidays," Mr. Sugden spluttered, "and they've all cancelled by wire. The one young fellow who's arrived leaves to-morrow, if he can get back. Called up, you see, to fight us."

"Good heavens!" Tony exclaimed. "Is all this certain?"

"Absolutely! Absolutely! You'll see it all in to-morrow morning's papers."

"And if Germany moves against France, what then?"

"We shall have to join in with France. Of course we shall! We can't have the Germans at Calais and Boulogne. Allowing for diplomatic exchanges, I calculate that by Wednesday next Germany and Austria will be at war with France and Russia, and that England will be at war with Germany and Austria, and Italy too, possibly, which'll mean that Stratton Lye'll have no boys next term. Why, it's as likely as not that they'll evacuate the civilian population from these coastal districts. Parents won't send their children here."

Jill gasped.

Peggy said: "Yes, there were prayers about it in church this morning. And they finished up with the National Anthem."

"Really?" Mr. Sugden exclaimed. "I wish I'd been."

"And the Vicar preached about the terrible choice that might be offered to England in the course of this week——"

"Yes. It's a—it's a——" Mr. Sugden's lips were trembling to reassert his captaincy of the conversation. "It's a question of Stratton Lye and next term, O'Grogan, and what we're all going to do, supposing the Germans are held off from the Channel ports and ordinary civilian life can still go on in these parts. People are saying that every man under thirty-

five will have to volunteer, so it seems to me that in any case my life's work at Stratton Lye is going to tumble like a house of cards. I was hoping to get some undertaking from you that you would stay at least for a term or two."

"Me?" Tony echoed. He had not so quickly related himself to the war.

"Yes, in case the worst comes to the worst, we must talk it over. Could you come and see me to-morrow?"

"We're supposed to be playing tennis to-morrow, aren't we, Honor?"

"It's hardly a time for tennis," Mr. Sugden objected. "Why, I've—I've half my investments in German securities."

"How'll this do?" Tony proposed. "I promise that *if* we declare war, I'll cancel all tennis and come and see you. Meantime I must consider my guests."

"Guests!" Mr. Sugden was not impressed with the word. "We'll have Germans for guests in a month or two. Enemy officers billeted in our best bedrooms."

Tony laughed. "Well, that'll at least save us from worrying about Stratton Lye. All'll be in the melting-pot then."

"Yes, yes, but we shan't let them in." Mr. Sugden could not conceive that the Allied Countries would allow Stratton Lye to be ruined. "We shall hold 'em. We shall hold 'em all along the French frontier. And quite the best thing that the older men like myself can do for our country will be to keep our establishments afloat within the lines. Dammit, education, of all things, mustn't stop."

And from every unselfish point of view—from the point of view of England who would need that her boys of to-day should be educated into the men of to-morrow—from the point of view of the boys themselves whose fathers would be taken from them to fight—he expounded to Tony why it was his duty, for the time at least, to give his services to Stratton Lye. He begged him to come and talk it over.

"I will," said Tony. "On Wednesday, if not before."

"Yes, do. Yes, do. If all the others weren't away on holidays, I'd have 'em down for a Council of War. 'Council of War,' that's the word! We must save Stratton Lye."

"We'll all do our best, I expect."

"Yes, I know you'll help me. Well, we must be going soon. We thought we'd motor into Brighton and see the crowds."

The Sugdens went into the hall, carrying the electric

conversation with them ; they delayed there ten minutes while it sparked again ; they took it down the brick path and continued it by the footboard of their car, to the accompaniment of the engine which Mr. Sugden had started unconsciously, during a lecture on the strategic advantages of a march through Belgium and Luxembourg ; and then the car rolled away, leaving a cloud of blue smoke, like a symbol of the last counsels of Mr. Sugden.

And, indeed, the smoke of Mr. Sugden's conversational exhaust hung about the cottage all that night, its smoke-blacks lying like dooms on the furniture, the flowers in the garden, and the stretching countryside. At the first possible moment after breakfast Tony rushed out to buy a paper and learn news. It was a hot Bank Holiday, and every man and woman was standing in some idle and talkative group at gateways or on thresholds. Any passer-by who chose to join in their debates was not only tolerated but welcomed. Tony marvelled that the shy, reticent English, who could so seldom bring themselves to speak to a stranger, should all have become brothers, and demonstrative, talkative brothers, as the great threat lifted in the sky. From these people Tony learned a score of rumours and two facts : that the German declaration of war with Russia was confirmed, and that the Foreign Secretary would make a speech in the House that afternoon to define England's place in the swinging and nervous balance of Europe. With this he had to be content.

After lunch the four young people from Sheep's Eye went to their tennis at the Armstrongs as if nothing menaced ; and in the excitement of their games forgot that Germany existed and that the Foreign Secretary was at that moment asking of the people's representatives in Parliament whether Britain's promises to France and Belgium should be honoured. The countries beyond the wire-netting of the tennis court were extinguished, but they came into existence again at the close of play, when Mr. Armstrong returned from London with grave shakings of his head. On their return home they found a hand-delivered letter from the Trevelyan's cancelling to-morrow's tennis, because young Trevelyan, who was a subaltern in the gunners, had been ordered by wire to report at once.

And the next morning, it being useless to fret and inflame their aching need of news, Jill suggested of a sudden what they must certainly do. " We must climb Wolstonbury again, and

see as much as possible of England. I feel I want to look again at those farmlands and church spires and the smokiness over London. I feel I shall look at her with new eyes this morning. I shall understand her for the first time. Don't you feel rather like that ? ”

Tony, after staring at her whimsically, announced : “ I speak as a fool, but I submit that Jill is a poet.”

“ Not a poet,” she protested. “ Or if I am, I've caught it from you. But I think I'm one who can understand what the poets try to get at.”

“ And how they must love you for existing,” Tony suggested.

Peggy and Honor being equally enthusiastic, they all set out once more for the climbing of Wolstonbury. They approached it from behind, toiling up past the chalk-pit of Newtimber lime works. From its foothills to its crown no human figure was seen on it, for the day's excitement had held the people to the pavements of their towns or the thresholds of their cottages. Only the ragwort marched in a golden procession up its shoulders, and the field-scabious and the devil's-bit ran beside it in a mauve array. On the first ridge where they rested they watched the chalk-blue butterfly scintillating along a purple streamer of thistle and knapweed and viper's bugloss. Their road up to the mysterious earthworks of Wolstonbury lay along a sunken footpath, where the wayfaring tree, at every few paces, held out to them its coral berries, like a gypsy peddling beads.

By the first great earthwork which portends a platform to dominate the Newtimber valley and the beechwoods and lemon-green slopes of Fulking Hill beyond, Tony paused and said : “ What a gun-position this would be ! ” and he remembered how the German students at Stratton Lye had said that they would appear as invaders over the whole line of the downs.

Ten minutes more of climbing, and they were on the top where was nothing seen except the clumps of wind-brushed thorn ; and the tall grasses obscuring the holes of England's earliest inhabitants, the cave-dwellers ; and the field-scabious and the harebells and the toad-flax and the thyme. A meadow-brown butterfly flitted ahead of them, and all around was the music of the cicada.

Now they judged themselves to be on the highest point, and stood to see the spread of England beneath them. Not yet was the great view in its fullness unveiled, for the mist of a hot

August day had curtained the distant North Downs and was even hiding the foot of Chanctonbury Hill, which rose from the diaphanous haze like a promontory out of the sea. But the effect of this mist was to increase the sense of distance, so that Chanctonbury, though a headland from their own chain of hills, seemed as if it were on the other side of England.

They sat down, rather silent, and waited; and it was not long before all the mists had gone. Now all that ever could be seen from Wolstonbury was before their eyes, in detail clearly drawn: the tessellated floor of meadows and hedgerows, splashed with the thick embroidery of tapestry trees; the far-off villages and towns; the line of the North Downs with Hindhead and Leith Hill in front; and the smoke over London.

"In the old days," said Tony, "they would have lit the warning beacon here, and Leith Hill would have answered it . . . and Ide Hill . . . and Black Down . . ."

The girls did not answer.

Tony looked at the hundreds of fields on the vast floor beneath him. Some were red with standard wheat, some were the cream of oats or barley, and some were spiked with the shadows of wheat in shocks. Others were close-cropped sunburnt meadows, and others were hayfields faded into grey. One was particoloured in five stripes, like a harlequin's leg; first the cream of corn, then the bright green of mangolds, then the brown of fallow earth, then the dull green of aftermath clover, and lastly a spotted strip where the corn stood in shocks. The ricks stood newly thatched by the sides of barns and in the meadow-lots near the gates. From any part of the scene came, now and then, a prick of light, which was the sun flashed from a window twenty or thirty miles away or from the wind-screen of a car on an unseen road. And that blueness beneath those elms—was it the blue smoke of a bonfire, or a pond among the trees?

"How quiet it all looks!" said Honor.

They began to talk together. So quiet it all looked down there, and yet it was all astir, everywhere, with anticipation and excitement and fear; astir to-day as it had never been in its history before, because its population was so much bigger than on the eve of previous wars, and the threat was so much darker. To think that every soul under those trees and those roofs, as far as they could see, was waiting—waiting for the same news! And those three horses drawing the reaping-machine in the

oat-field—perhaps they would be taken to draw the guns, and even to die for the fields they had served.

Peggy was the only one with the courage to speak the emotion quivering in her.

“Dear England !” she murmured.

And Tony nodded. He thought of adding, “We may be Irish, but I dunno : I suppose one’s nationality is really determined by the country which has been the playground of one’s childhood.” But he did not.

The birds down there—look ! The birds were not easily seen from these heights at first, but with an effort they could be distinguished, dipping and banking and hovering, like the notes, despite all, of Nature’s unconquerable joy. Some of them knew, one might guess, that they were winning admiration from four people on Wolstonbury Hill, and disported themselves for further praise. How was this for a dipping arc, and this for a cleaving uprush ? And there were two, higher up and farther away, which showed a twinkling delight in making themselves visible and invisible, by catching the sun for one moment and then shaking it adrift again. They went in and out, two intermittent and evasive lights, in the peaceful air. The birds, dipping and switchbacking and hovering over their parcel of England, as if in love with such a place for play.

CHAPTER V

DOWN AMONG THE PEOPLE

WEDNESDAY, war being declared, Father Michael came to fetch Peggy home, there being many things he was anxious to arrange and discuss, because he had that morning written to the Chaplain-General to offer his services as a chaplain. He seemed to think he might be called up before lunch time to-morrow.

Tony, Honor, and Jill were restless all day, and suddenly, as the darkness gathered, Tony said to the two girls: "Look here, *you* Go and get your hats and coats on. We're going to Brighton We are going on the pier, which is sure to be absolutely crowded and we'll hear the bands playing the National Anthems of the Allies. These be historic scenes, not to be missed."

"O Tony!" They both jumped with delight. "O, do let's. How gorgeous!"

"Let's! There's no 'Let's' about it. The order has gone forth. Hurry up, hurry up."

And two hours later they were jammed in the crowds on Brighton pier.

Who will forget those first nights of the war in places where the bands played—such a night as this into which came Tony, Jill and Honor? The band drumming out the airs that held the Englishman's patriotism and sentiment; the crowds, as far as a turning head could see, rolling up the choruses: "Hearts of oak are our ships, Hearts of oak are our men! Steady, boys, steady! We'll fight and we'll conquer again and again;" and the indifferent stars looking on. The women as inflamed as the men, but with moist and swelling eyes; the children on their parents' shoulders, cheering they knew not what. "Drake is going West, lads, His ships are in the bay;" "If the Dons sight Devon, He'll quit the port of

Heaven, And drum them up the channel, As we drummed them long ago." The cheers when a man came amongst them who was already in his khaki; and when two grinning Jack Tars pushed their way down the pier. The pier illuminations, in the still night, a necklace of fairy lamps, so soon to be put out for four years. The noise of the crowds on the esplanades rolling over the water to the crowds on the pier. The crowds on the pier shouting a chorus that the whole town might hear. "Should auld acquaintance be forgot, And never brought to mind, We'll tak' a cup of kindness yet, For the sake of Auld Lang Syne." And the music of the National Anthems: the "Marseillaise"—"*Aux armes, citoyens! Formez vos bataillons! Marchons, marchons!*" And, over all, the indifferent stars looking on.

Tony, Honor and Jill were as flushed as the rest, Tony even intoxicated with a new thought that was surging in his head. It had come bearing into him on the waves of music and emotion. All martial music speaks of sacrifice; and to some natures the sight of a great multitude speaks the same message. By Jove!—for the first time he was hearing it, as the band played "The March of the Men of Harlech," and the crowd, not knowing any words, roared the melody—by Jove! this war meant that the time was over for personal matters. With what splendid timeliness, after his strange talk with Jill, had the hour struck for serving other than personal ends! He must think this out! Yes, there was something calling here.

And when the music was over he held his wife's arm and Jill's all the way up the thronged pavements from the pier to the station, and poured into the ears of both of them, though aware that Honor did not understand him as well as Jill, his conception of this war as an escape from poor little local and personal "beauties" into something bleaker and grander and lonelier. Compelling them almost to run beside him, so fast went his feet in the accompaniment to his words, he expounded that life didn't square with logic at all; that though your Tolstoy's and your pacifists could put up a colossal case in the realms of reason and religion for refusing to support a government in a war, yet something in him was crying: "You must go! You must go, not because you want to inflict suffering on your enemies, but because you want to share it with your friends."

It was an inflamed, distorted talk, but flashed sparks of truth, as all emotional utterance does: it was like the outburst of one

who stands on a hill and sees for the first time a wider and stranger country than any he has conceived. Tony was eager to rush towards what he saw. For twenty years he had hunted his happiness in egocentric loves, his clear intellect critical of the enterprise but his emotions driving him on; and now he gave his allegiance to something, hazily glimpsed but intuitively recognized, whose centre was outside himself. He was but one of thousands such, and they found their spokesman, as the world knows :

“ Now God be thanked Who has matched us with His hour,
And caught our youth, and wakened us from sleeping . . . ”

Jill was soon summoned home by her father ; doubtless the old gentleman, catching the fever in the air, had yielded to the crazy rumours about the War Office commandeering all the South Coast railways for the movement of troops. Tony took her to Hassocks station, whose usually quiet booking office and platforms were a-bustle and a-fluster with holiday-makers hastening home. And while they waited there, a mysterious train, its wagons chalked “ W ↑ D ” and their loads hidden under tarpaulins on which sat an occasional soldier, rumbled slowly but unstopping through the station, stared at by hundreds of eyes, above gaping mouths. As Jill’s train was sighted, Tony, who had long been examining her with a sideways look, put out his hand.

“ Good-bye, Jill.”

“ Good-bye, Tony,” said she, taking his hand and looking up into his face. “ I’ve had a wonderful time. I shall remember our talks always. I was thinking about them all night.”

“ I wish you weren’t going. . . . ”

“ So do I. . . . ”

“ Give me a kiss, Jill. You’ve never given me a kiss.”

At once she put up her face, and when his arms embraced her with a tightening affection, her body, in a moment’s uncontrol, pressed hungrily against his. Those watching must have thought them lovers, had he not quickly lifted his lips from hers.

“ Good-bye, my dear . . . and, Jill, remember I : : . ”

“ What ? . . . ”

"Remember I value your friendship more than any other I possess."

"And I yours, I think, Tony."

The carriages of a crowded train were alongside, and he put her into the least uncomfortable he could find. From the window she broke an embarrassed silence with talk of common things, and his answers drifted along the same daily surface. The train started with a jerk; he pressed her fingers in a parting and humorous benediction, and, the separation widening, both gave their hands to waving. The train out of sight, Tony swung quickly about and walked out of the station into the glow of the late afternoon.

He walked the whole way back to Sheep's Eye with a stride deliberately merry. It was the kind of merriness that is designed to brow-beat and laugh out a fear. All that road he was answering some question in his mind with a "No, no;" and again, "No, no. No, no, *no!*" Sometimes his lips framed the word, and his head shook. Sometimes he uttered it aloud with an expletive: "My God, no!" No, he would not succumb to the old craving—he believed in it no more. One thing he would always know: he could never love anyone more than he had once loved Honor. *That* was love, so he had had his experience of it. He wouldn't try it out again.

But the old craving was strong; it tugged at his heart with its promise of the familiar pains, joys, anxieties and anguishes which heightened life so gloriously. Who could turn from such a promise? It almost had him down, and he laughed rather bitterly to think that, within twenty-four hours of all his fine words to Jill and Honor about the necessity of transcending mere personal craving, he should be in its grip again. He realized that if he could throw this assailant now, it might prove in the end to have been a decisive conflict. "Once make this step, and I shall have crossed over into easier country. And I can do it, I can do it. . . ."

He looked round about him for help, on the road that he was walking. It was the road down which he had eloped with Honor in a motor car, holding her hand and saying: "It was wonderful of you to do this. For *me!* gosh! I'll not forget it."

That settled it. That last memory settled it. He made his decision and believed that he had taken the vital step out of the lush valleys on to the colder foothills; and, as often happens in

such moments of belief, the joy of conquest exceeded the pain of renunciation. He heard himself exclaiming—for he fell easily into phrases: “I am free. I am free. . . .”

In the cottage he broke a fine plan that had been germinating during the last mile. “Honor. Honor, hurry up with some food. We’re off for a jaunt together to Brighton again. We must, we simply must see those crowds and hear the bands again. I can’t say why, but the sight of it all just *gets* me. I want to go back and feel once more all that I felt last night.”

And Honor repeated her enthusiastic approval: “O yes, do let’s, do let’s.”

“Come on, then. But I say, Honor, you can give me a kiss, if you like. You look pretty to-night.”

She, as Jill one hour before, came to his arms, and he hugged her as if she were the best thing to hang on to. “Do you know, you’re quite a pretty thing! You look as pretty as I’ve ever seen you to-night. Come on, let’s go and hear the music again, and feel ready for anything.”

CHAPTER VI

"TIME" IS CALLED

ONE by one the men of those two families went to the war's fronts. An autumn filled with the rumblings and movements of war hinted to the discerning that the early falls and trickles must soon become a landslide of English things eastward to Europe and the Levant. The recruiting posters appeared on every hoarding. "Surely you will fight for your King and Country," said one, marvellously ignorant of the way to appeal to Englishmen. Another turned the face of Lord Kitchener, the Secretary of State for War, and his pointing finger towards every man in the street, and gave the words below: "Lord Kitchener wants *You!*" It was enough to make any Englishman stay where he was. But later, after Lord Kitchener had died, when the same face and the same pointing finger stood above the words, "Carry on!" it was enough to make any man ready to go. They had learnt better by then. They had taken down from the front of a big shop in London the long streamer which said: "Who lives if England die, Who dies if England live?" They had removed the poster which insolently cried: "Why are You not in Khaki?" and they were trying instead, "Sign on for the Great International between England and Germany," and "'Arf a mo', Kaiser!" For the Englishman's patriotism is of such a kind that it must not be shown; it must come abroad veiled as humour. The face of Lord Kitchener, and his finger pointing at each shy creature in this island, probably achieved far less than the staring face of the dispatch-rider, and his finger pointing behind him to the battle and the fired houses and the stretcher-bearers. "They want more men" was his simple statement.

The air was full of songs; but it was the same story with

them. Keatings, completely Englished by this time, could sit in a theatre and listen with a despairing grin to the *ingénue* lady who came before the curtain and sang, of her impertinence, "We don't want to lose you, But we think you ought to go;" and he even declared that he, for his part, was going to stay long enough to make a really decent collection of the white feathers which the feather-brained young ladies were presenting to the young gentlemen still in their "civies." He wanted enough to frame. Self-appointed laureates wrote songs for marching recruits; but was one of them sung? Not one. Nor the old songs either, once the first mad nights of the war had passed. The recruits marched in every street of every village and town of England; and they were never singing "Land of Hope and Glory" or "Rule Britannia," but:

"Who were you with last night?
Oh, who were you with last night?
Who was the dreamy
Peaches and creamy
Vision of pure delight?
Was it your little sister, mister?
Answer me, honour bright.
Will you tell your wife in the morning
Who were you with last night?"

The air was full of sounds. Peggy, in her Essex home, could hear the guns at practice in Shoeburyness near by, and at Sheerness across the Thames. Tony heard them at points along the Sussex coast. All England heard the hum of aeroplanes overhead. The noise of artillery on the roads and in the lanes was an unmistakable sound, mixing the clapper of horses, the jingle of spurs and harness, and the rumble of steel-girt wheels. The long convoys of motor lorries were easily distinguished, too—so many heavy vehicles all travelling at the same pace; and people came to their gates to watch the procession go by.

At night one imagined that one could distinguish the slow rolling of troop trains from the sound of all other trains.

Much faster than the lorries went the purring ambulances and the dispatch-riders on their motor bicycles; and the streets were a day-long drama. Especially those that led down to the ports: down them in riotous song went the sailors returning after shore-leave to their ships; the German prisoners, marching between guards with fixed bayonets, to their prison hulks

in the river; the men in heavy equipment and service caps marching to the French steamers; the men in light equipment and pith helmets marching to the big eastbound transports; and the detachments of nurses in grey and red; and the Red Cross stores.

And with this eastward landslide of English things the men of the two families went one by one. General Daubeney battered daily at the War Office for work, however modest, and was sent at last to a large city in France as its Town Major, an appointment over which he huzza'd like an undergraduate. Father Michael, after spending months in anticipation of his chaplaincy and in censure of the Chaplain-General as a Protestant who denied to Catholics their proper representation in the army, suddenly abandoned his oft-repeated dogma that "he who held the chalice should not hold the rifle," and enlisted in the Essex Regiment as a combatant, with an unequivocal lie about his age. He seemed so happy in his new life that Tony always suspected that he had been glad to escape from priestly duties and a hidden spiritual malaise. Warner Gabriel obtained his chaplaincy almost at once—much to the indignation of Father Michael, who declared that it was because the child was a broad churchman and had an Archdeacon for father. John Gabriel was a subaltern in the London Scottish and took part in their charge which rang through the land, much to the annoyance of Keatings. Len Daubeney wrote that he was going with an Indian Brigade to France, and that Joyce must stay with her child in England till the troubles settled. Before September was on the wane Derek received his commission in the Army Service Corps (Motor Transport Section), and in the same month Keatings enlisted as a private in the London Irish; and the difference between the competent and intense young officer and the humble, cynical private was the difference between Derek and Keatings. "Derek'll be a Colonel before the war's over; he's got all the bounce," said Keatings. And there was no doubt that Derek, wearing gravity and despairs more often than humour, enjoyed his part in the saving of the Empire; whereas Keatings frankly detested *his* part, and when asked how he liked the World War, disposed of it in a sentence: "I never did like gardening."

Derek was splendidly magisterial in these early months. He convened a meeting of the whole family, whereat his commonplace romanticism, if somewhat ponderous in its phrasing, did

him honour as a son of the O'Grogan house (so the Family agreed at last) and as a son of Britain. That his firm should be profiting by the war, said he, and would profit still more, was an undeniable fact that kept his conscience uneasy, and he honestly felt that some of his income ought to be devoted to the prosecution of the war. Let Keatings therefore have no anxiety about his mother, nor Tony about his wife; he, Derek, would instruct his bankers to pay the women all that they could need.

"And in the event," added poor Derek, blushing for the first time, "of my—er—death, my executors will hold my estate, such as it is, in trust for the Family. You see—er—I've nobody else. . . . And if Keatings should be the one to fall, or Tony, I should like—I should like, if you will allow me, to regard the care of their dependants as a first charge on myself."

When the meeting was over, Joyce said to Keatings, not without tears, "Really, old Derek's rather magnificent. I don't think we've ever appreciated him properly;" and Keatings, also a little moved, replied, "Yes, he's a fool, of course—a pompous, unimaginative ass, but I expect it's his type that's going to save England now—and all of us."

Tony, though the first to be eager, was the last to go. Mr. Sugden, restlessly worrying and rooting round Stratton Lye, like a mother brontosaurus round her nest of little reptiles, begged Tony to consider only his duty to his wife, which was manifestly, said he, to remain quietly at his present job of teaching for Mr. Sugden. At any rate till such time as all the single men had been conscripted for the army, and the married men were being summoned; "Single men first!" Mr. Sugden proclaimed. Finding that this did not carry full conviction to his young colleague, he begged him to consider only his duty to his country, which was clearly to stay where he was and teach the children in the absence of their fathers. He pointed out that the East Coast schools would certainly be ruined by the German air-raiders, and it was up to the South Coast schools to hold the educational fort for England. "Business as usual," he said; and Tony had an immediate sense that Mr. Sugden, who cashed everything, was glad that he could do his duty to his country now and cash the misery of the East Coast dwellers. Then he begged Tony to consider his duty to himself, which was clearly to stay in England, and at Stratton Lye, till such time as he had passed his

Finals, when he would get a good commission and be of much greater use to the nation as an officer than as a private.

This last reason was the only one that carried much weight with Tony, and it kept him in England till early 1915 when, having passed his Finals, he joined the Artists Rifles O.T.C. Derek, Keatings, and Len Daubeney were already in France, Father Michael was leaving for "the Mediterranean," Warner Gabriel was in Egypt, and John Gabriel was dead. "In which matter they've gone ahead of us once again," said Keatings grimly. "The Gods have ordained that they shall always be first."

The friends of Tony's past were all at their places. Little Wavers was a guardee subaltern in France; old Raking, as might have been expected of him, was just as far afield as he could get, having left a Malay plantation to accompany Townshend to Kut; there was a Colonel Chandry, so Len Daubeney wrote, in his Indian Brigade; Frank Doyly had fought at Neuve Chapelle and was still "somewhere in France." And all those boys of Stratton Lye whom Tony had first seen gathered together round the dining-tables of the school were scattered abroad, like chaff tossed into the drive and the caprice of the eastward gale. They were on foreign soil and on unnamed seas, and many of them were in the air. He was jealous of their precedence.

He went at Midsummer. In July he had been drafted as a Second Lieutenant to a battalion of Lancashire territorials, wherein he had hardly learned his ropes, or the names of the men in his platoon, before the cry of Gallipoli summoned the whole brigade to "the Mediterranean." It was on two early August days that he went on his last leave to those of his family who were still to be found in England. And they were Jill Daubeney, nursing at a hospital in Leicestershire, Peggy and Joyce living at his mother's house with their two little boys, and Honor who was to make her home with Mrs. Daubeney. Not unconscious of his subaltern's uniform, whose buttons were polished to a precious brilliance and whose Sam Browne belt reflected portions of the first-class compartments and the taxis, he travelled first to Jill's hospital, where he had but an hour; and Jill, touched to melting by his quick swoop to her side, gave him the sweet memory of her kiss, her hand-pressure, her quivering mouth and her last strange bursting word: "You still count me the first of your friends after Honor,

don't you? . . . I want to be that. . . . O Tony, I suppose everyone has always loved you."

Then he went home to the little house at Chiswick, where his mother and Peggy and Joyce and Honor awaited him. Joyce tried all night to be her lively self, whose loyalties and affections used to be hidden under a bright glaze, but the glaze showed a split when suddenly she said: "We shan't have a man left, now Tony's going. Just Mother and Peggy and I—just the O'Grogan women left uselessly at home. Ah, well, I suppose we should have been still more apart, if there had been no horrid old war; it's dispersed the men, but it's assembled the women of the Family again. Like old times. I vote we all live close together if—if all of us—when this business is over. We'll all live on top of each other in some English village. Peggy must have the Vicarage, and Tony a prep-school of his own, and Derek (bless him!) the Great House and Park, and old Keatings'll be there with Mother in a cottage somewhere, like the funny old family anchor he is, and Len and I'll retire young and breed pigs and poultry. Then all our infants can play together. Between us we'd make the village sit up. Don't you think it's a good idea, Tony? I do, because as I keep on telling you, only you *won't* listen, I realize more and more as I get so horribly old that nothing matters in life except palliness and human relationships and—well, you know what I mean. . . ."

Peggy concealed her feelings all the evening, but had no intention of concealing them a minute too long. She was silent while they were all together, leaving the talk to Joyce and Honor, but in mortal fear lest her youngest brother should leave without hearing from her all that she longed to say. She begged him in an aside, when at a late hour they were separating for bed, to come and say good night to her in her room. So Tony, going into the little narrow chamber that used to be Keatings's burrow, sat on Keatings's iron bed at Peggy's side. Michael Derek in his cot slept by them as they talked. The talk deepened in intimacy and widened in range till they were speaking of large general things: of religion and art and love and marriage. At first they had spoken impersonally as if their words related not at all to any experiences of their own but Tony, before he could make up his mind to go, had confessed in a sentence to this, his best loved sister, that he had learned a lesson like hers.

"Peggy, there's no such thing as the perfect union one dreams of."

"Oh, surely!" Peggy protested.

"No. Only for the may-fly's hour. It's a drooping thing at best. Everyone has always said so, but one must go through with it before one will believe it, and so the world wags on."

Peggy kept silence. This was a confession from her brother, and an answer would not come easily to her lips.

"That's why," continued Tony, "I'm grateful to this war for one thing at least: it has suddenly drawn life in a larger manner for us. And by bringing death so near——"

"Oh, don't! Tony——"

"It has shown some of us that there are much more important things than little disappointments like that—primary, fundamental things—husbandhood, I mean, and paternity. It has given us a big lift towards getting out of our excessive 'personalness.'"

Peggy frowned over this without understanding, she being one who must be personal or perish.

"But, Tony: there *is* a personal love that is completely and eternally satisfying, and that only becomes more and more wonderful as one lives longer with it."

"Have *you* found it?"

"Yes."

He looked sharply at her. "How do you mean?"

"I mean—I mean, if one can't have a perfect union with a fellow creature, one can always have it with God."

"Oh. . . ." He understood; and left the matter there.

"Tony: have you quite given up your writing?"

"Yes, rather!" he exclaimed, succumbing to the weakness of being dramatic; then drew himself into a worthier attitude. "At least, in the old way. You see, the old light that was on everything went out. But I think I'm beginning to catch another sadder kind of radiance on the edges of things, that would be worth writing about, if I could see it more clearly."

Just then little Michael Derek stirred in his cot, as if he heard voices in the room.

"Hush!" laughed Tony, rising. "I must go. Youth is restive against such nonsense."

But Peggy, rising too, held on to the lapels of his khaki jacket, to keep him a few minutes more.

"You didn't destroy all that you wrote, did you?"

"No, I nearly did, but——"

"Then, Tony, will you let me have it to keep? That's what I wanted to ask."

"It's worthless."

"It isn't. And I want it for a very special reason."

"What is that?"

"I've always believed you're going to be enormously famous one day, and then I'm going to write your life. I've set my heart on it. So I shall want your early thoughts, please."

"If it's never published till someone wants to read my life, there's not much danger of its ever being given to the world."

"We shall see," said the faithful Peggy significantly.

"Certainly you can have it, my dear: but if ever it did see the light, you would make it clear, wouldn't you, that the fool forswore it all when he grew up—that it was only a young man's romanticism."

The child stirred.

"Good night, Peggy." He laughed again, and pointed the moral. "Youth stirs in its sleep at the mention of romance. Let us not wake it too soon. Good night. Honor'll think I'm never coming."

"Good night, Tony," whispered Peggy.

Honor alone accompanied him to the station and the platform and the train door; and holding her the last time for many a year, perhaps, he could hardly speak; nor she; but his thought was: "She is the elemental fact." He realized this better, somehow, as he recovered a sense of his surroundings and saw that they were only one pair out of a hundred such, on that streaming platform. All that Honor could tell him she told in her last long, unreleasing kiss; and then the train broke the hand-hold which was their last contact; and he was one face out of hundreds laughing, and one hand out of hundreds waving.

Four days later he moved down the water from Southampton Docks into the Solent, misty and pale-tinted with morning, and, though one of five thousand officers and men on the third largest liner in the world, knew the meaning of loneliness for the first time in his life. A crowd of Tommies, lolling on the deck, were singing in lazy chorus:

"If you were the only girl in the world

And I were the only boy,

Nothing else would matter in the world to-day . . ."

and when they passed another ship on the water, they burst into a greeting :

“Hello, hello, hel-lo ! it’s a different girl again . . .”

The lifting summits of the Isle of Wight rose out of a bank of mist, just as Chanctonbury and the downs had risen that morning when he and Honor and Peggy and Jill had stood on Wolstonbury to look at England’s last day of peace. He hoped that the mists would open and vanish that he might see the church tower and white pier of little Yarmouth, and the red villas of vulgar little Totland, and the coloured cliffs of Alum Bay. Such little spots they seemed now. And the great ship, escorted by destroyers, went with a slow majesty down the Solent, so that his wish was granted and he saw the places of his boyish holidays and his youthful love. They hurt him, but not unbearably ; almost there was a pleasure in their pain, as with the pain of a healing bruise. There were the Needles, flat as jagged shards in the direct light of the sun ; and beyond, the open sea glistening. He remembered all the people he had known here : Emily Holt, old Raking, his father, Captain Alum ; all those who had appeared for a space in his life and gone out of sight. How Captain Alum, were he alive now, would have loved to stand on a spur above Alum Bay with his black curls blowing in the wind, and to sing the great transports out to sea !

“God be with you till we meet again ;
Keep love’s banner floating o’er you,
Smite death’s threatening wave before you :
God be with you till we meet again.”

“I had a brother and two sisters,” Captain Alum had said, “and we played together ; and now even their faces are going from me.” Keatings, Joyce, Derek, Peggy ; it was possible that he had looked his last upon them. Jill ; and Honor, too, his wife. Nothing was stable, nothing permanent—unless Peggy were right. And yet how could one endure without something stable, still, perpetual, in time but not of it, nor knowing its touch ? Southward turned the ship, and now the underside of the island swung towards them, a long wave of white cliffs folding inward to the shadows of Freshwater Bay. The bay opened and he could descry the houses that he had known. The wrench at his heart easing with the minutes, he fell to

wondering that the exigencies of war should have sent his great ship down the Solent and round the Needles instead of down the eastern channel and out by Spithead, and so allowed that Freshwater's little cove, of all the places along England's sea-line, should be the last to stand forth as a picture, with details clear and intimate. For now the cliffs were diminishing to a ribbon under an immense sky, and the world was becoming a world of sea. And a "funny man" among the officers began to salute the descending hills with a song :

" We don't want to lose you,
But we think you ought to go . . . "

Like a thousand others on that ship Tony stayed watching the cliffs till they were gone into the past, and then turned to face the empty and heaving path ahead, so pitilessly pointed out by the bows of the ship as they forged onward, but mercifully revealing naught.

BOOK II
THE JESTING ARMY

SONG

*Here fight I for England. Why, God knows !
Her red roofs know behind their quiet elms ;
Her byres and her hedgerows know,
And all her gentle hills,
And they will tell me why, if I return.*

*And if I fall, I think they'll murmur why,
In some dry desert as my light goes out,
Or in some other land, whose woods and hills,
Though kindly too, shall lack, to one man's fading glance,
The quiet and the gentleness of hers.*

*So I shall know one day
The meaning of the weald beneath the downs,
And why I went to guard its truth
In other lands.*

PART I.

CHAPTER I

A SHIP OUT OF THE NORTH-WEST

THIS was a complete circle of the sea, empty and calm beneath an empty sky. The sun, just lifting above the horizon, had the world to itself: a very peaceful world with nothing human anywhere. The sun sailed upward along its arc, and nothing happened except the changing light and the movement of the colours on the floor of the sea. Purples and mauves passed away under the sun's feet; turquoise, indigo and aquamarine lay about for a while and then slipped home, disappearing with all the modesty of colour. The sun climbed halfway to its noon height, burnishing the sky almost to whiteness; and the sea, too dazzled now to be anything but a mirror, lay there, one stable brilliance from sky to sky.

Soon on the north-west rim a thread of smoke appeared, lifting itself a little way towards the zenith, but perishing quickly in that peaceful sky; the light slaying it as fast as it trembled upward. And under the thread came gradually a little wraith of indeterminate shape forming itself in the ribbon of haze. The wraith was moving fast, for already it had the outline of a ship, and a great one too—three—four—funnels coming into view. Had there been a human watcher in that ring of sea he must have wondered at the rapid approach of the vessel and at its perturbing zigzag course. Why in a sea so calm and empty should a ship, with all its power working, steer south-east-by-east for a space, then south-east-by-south, and then south-east-by-east again?

When she was in the centre of the circle with all her decks visible, he might have wondered more. From bow to stern, from funnel to keel, the ship was black. And suddenly, as

four bells sounded, an alarum hooted from the funnel, though the sea had never been such a painted peace; and at once thousands of soldiers in field-brown serge rushed to the decks, tying their life-belts as they came. At their muster stations by the boats that would save them, they paraded in their platoons, standing three deep with their backs to the walls of the state-rooms and their faces to the sea. Their officers stood in single file along the deck rails, with their backs to safety and their faces to the men. And at points along the rails, where the boats, if lowered, would halt for their passengers, the sentries stood with their bayonets fixed.

And now a General Officer—O.C. Troops, no doubt—with a ship's officer beside him, passed along the ranks of men, reviewing them. After a quarter of an hour, the word went that he was satisfied: "Dismiss!" It echoed itself from end to end of the ship, which had been ploughing rapidly onward all the time. There was a break-up of the ordered ranks and of the silence. All became a confusion of movement and chatter, with laughter and grumbling leaping out of it. The chatter was mostly in the brogue of men who came from the middle parts of a North Sea island, but there was some from the men of its capital too, and some from the men of its western spits. The laughter belonged to all: and so did the grumbling.

The watcher on the sea might not have understood all this, but the men in the ship did. Yesterday morning their huge black-painted liner came out of her English Channel, accompanied by little low-lying warships with Jack Tars aboard, and God bless them for the comfort they were! But as soon as they had escorted her into the wide Atlantic—at eight bells precisely—they turned about and went home, with their white ensigns roaring above them—for which abandonment might God take back His blessing of them!—and thereafter the troopship steered her zigzag course, her look-out in the crow's-nest anxiously scanning the seas ahead, and a military officer on the deck training his Zeiss glasses on the seas around. Both were looking for a little dark spot on the water which would be the single eye of the enemy; both half dreading to see this speck, since it promised death, and half hoping to see it, since it promised excitement; for both were young. Moreover the military officer had twenty armed soldiers in the ship's bows and twenty more in her stern, ready to fire on this sinister

little eye and blind it. This was his Submarine Picket, and he would have liked to use it once; he would have liked to blaze away at a German periscope.

The congestion after the Dismiss quickly disentangled itself, and once more the officers were walking up and down the promenade decks in twos and threes, and the "Other Ranks" were reclining on the lower decks, and on the poop and on the foc'sle. They all seemed much the same in their khaki uniforms: just England's standardized machines for fighting; the officers a more expensive variety than the privates, who were put together cheaply enough, God knows. But one on that ship is to be singled out and spoken of: the young officer on Submarine Duty, who now walked along to a transverse rail for'ard, from which he could look down at the multitude of tommies reclining on the hatches and the deck-spaces below.

It was Antony O'Grogan.

Tony was forgetting about submarines, as he gazed down at the recumbent soldiers. They, for the most part, were taking the air and the Biscayan sun in little more clothing than their khaki trousers and their "Army grey-back" shirts. A few sat or knelt about a game of "House!" On a donkey engine, with his trousers rolled above his naked knees and his sleeves above his elbows, a sun-burned youngster sat, thrumming a mandoline and quietly singing:

"If you were the only girl in the world
And I were the only boy
Nothing else would matter in the world to-day. . . .

Occasionally a "funny man," without rising from his supine position, sent a jest upon the air: "Eh, lads, but are we there yet? Call me when tha can see them Dardanelles," and another answered him: "Nay, Joa, Ah reckon it'll be quite woon o'clock afore we're in;" at which there was laughter from those who were awake, encouraging a third humorist to outdo the others: "Do Ah care how long it takes us to get there? Do Ah? *Thoomp!* Ah never was a soldier, tha knows."

But these voices were sporadic and intermittent; the only regular sounds were the voice of the man calling "House!" and the quiet humming of the mandoline-player. He sang alone; only when he strummed up the irresistible chorus,

"Here we are again," did a great number of the men join in :

"Here we are, here we are, here we are again,
Tom and Dick and Harry, and feeling as right as rain.
Are we downhearted? *No!* Let 'em all come. . . ."

Half a hundred of them found themselves roaring this information across the empty, unheeding seas. Then fell the wide peace again; and the mandoline-player, who was a shy fellow, suddenly perceived that someone on the deck-rail was watching him with humorous eyes; and, blushing crimson, he withdrew his shameful instrument behind the donkey engine, out of sight. And all the while the ship went on, carrying its cargo of souls to that peninsula of Gallipoli where, as it was said in August, 1915, the average life of a man was fourteen days.

Five minutes later the peace was shattered. The men were getting up, moving about, and reshaping themselves as ordered platoons and drafts: it was the parade for "Physical Jerks." And they stood there now, stripped to their vest and trousers, and obeying the raucous commands of their sergeants. The young officer watching them was much impressed: to say the truth, when these lads had swarmed up the gangways of the ship, overloaded with equipment and coats and kitbags and helmets, he had thought them a rather slovenly crowd, and quite unequal to the task of driving the Turks out of Gallipoli; but now as he saw them in their skin-tight vests, with the tint of health on their throats and forearms and their muscles rippling everywhere, he thought them an army of strapping fellows quite equal to most jobs in this present quarrelling world.

An acre of naked arms, swinging in unison through the sunlight, like a field played upon by a fitful wind; and all around the endless sea—it was a curious picture. A few were the gnarled limbs of veterans, but most were fresh, round arms, lately taken from boyish tasks; all were fair arms, the fruit of a northern country, and all were very clean arms, so odd are the ideals of that country. Some spoke of manual toil, and some of a softer life at office desks. A number of them were tattooed; and here again the watching officer read the sentimentality which, a few minutes ago, he had heard in their songs. On seven different arms he saw a pattern of two hearts pierced by a single arrow; on one the words "I love

Annie Chambers" generously illuminated; and on another a mother's tombstone.

"Stand at ease!"

All the arms sank out of sight.

"Dismiss!"

The men went back again to their peace: an English peace: the peace of lying under the sun on a troopship which was still a long way from the war, and of being good-humoured and irresponsible and grumblingly confident; the peace of a patient race.

Tony lifted his field glasses to examine the surrounding seas. They were as empty as always. Not once since the destroyers went home had the troopship lifted a sail above the horizon. *Ab ba*, that was what happened if you let slip the British navy from its leashes: it drove the enemy's shipping off the seas, and forced the neutrals (with their flags painted on their hulls) to follow its chosen channels. "A somewhat bossy proceeding," said Tony, who was one of the *Intelligentsia* and rightly detested jingoism: "a very bossy proceeding," said he—and thrilled with delight at it. For the honest truth is that "the unrepentant Britisher" against whom Tony had often thundered, lurked in him, as in every one of us, let him argue how he would.

But even as he grinned at the clean-swept seas the man in the look-out half way up the foremast tinkled his bell twice and fixed his glass on a far-away spot. Immediately a rumour blew along the deck, and Tony was soon but one of a large group of officers who were all training their field-glasses on the same spot. The spot had become two spots. And after a short time, so rapidly was the troopship travelling, the officers' glasses made out a government vessel towing a malicious little monitor to its duties off the Dardanelles. As they overtook it, it seemed but a floating platform, with a long gun which had turned its nozzle towards the eastward battles, and a white ensign roaring in the wind behind. The trooper dropped a friendly signal, and a thousand soldiers waved their hands, to this little fellow-fighter.

The ship passed under the sun and left it behind to drop

into the sea : it passed out of the noon heat into the coolness of evening. Six bells sounded, and a bugle rang the Officers' Mess call over the higher decks :

" Officers' wives have pudding and pies,
Sergeants' wives have skilly."

The soldiers hummed the words that filled the call, and made cynical but tolerant comments on the fine meal to which their officers were now strolling. For an hour the promenade decks were deserted, while the noise of jingling cutlery came out of the ports on to the seas, and the ship went on. Then little groups of officers, their inner machinery warmed and comfortably moving, began to reappear upon the decks. Tony emerged with a companion.

This companion was a subaltern whose acquaintance he had made the previous day. Hughes Anson was his name, but his familiars called him " The Roseate Hughes," or " Rosy," because at the top of his tall powerful body was a round face with cheeks rubicund from hearty living and fearless drinking. He was no part of the 378th Lancashire Brigade which filled most of the ship, but one of the many officers who were taking out drafts to the 162nd (Essex) Division, so Tony had not met him before. But he was fast developing an affection for Rosy : there was such an intellectual ruthlessness about him, and his talk gave you such delightful shocks. It was typical of this ruthlessness that he was the only officer on the ship with his hair shaved down to his skull in what was known as the " Dartmoor Crop " : he had come from the French trenches ; no cattle in his hair for him ! And also that, in the days before this amusing war, he should have thrown up the profession of a solicitor with its meagre profits, for the wholly unmoral but wholly fascinating game of Advertising, where, said he, you exploited to the utmost, and in the most diverting way, every cupidity and weakness of the mob, and were properly paid for doing it.

" And now let's drink," said Hughes, after two strolls round the deck. " It's my birthday to-day. Yes, it's my birthday."

" Not really ? " asked Tony.

" Yes. I'm sure it is. I haven't had a birthday for seven or eight months. Come and celebrate." He broke into the Smoking-room, where there were many officers. " I will gather a few stout fellows and get drunk. What are birthdays

for? . . . Joey, are you coming to my birthday party? You needn't if you don't want to; there's no compulsion. Graham, you sot, you'll come, I know . . . and Doc—come on, Doc; we shall probably need your treatment soon. . . .”

Thus The Roseate Hughes, who was as generous with his money as he was with his shocks, collected a worthy company around him; a dozen of them—twelve apostles—and stout men all. He was resolved that they should sit down thirteen at a table and defy the Luck of Gallipoli. “Whisky is the stuff to get tight on; we'll do it quickest on whisky.” And when the glasses were brought, and the steward had been treated in honour of Lieutenant Hughes Anson's nativity, the young officers lifted their glasses to toast him: “Many happy returns, Rosy!”

“Don't mention it,” he demurred. “I shall certainly have my next birthday before the voyage is over. Better cram in as many birthdays as possible, in case——” He shrugged his shoulders.

“Oh well, cut that out,” said the youngster, Graham.

“But why? Why blink one's eyes at it? . . . And what I want to know is: what on earth did I join the army for, and risk my life? . . . Can you tell me, Joey? I must have had some good selfish reason, but for the moment I have lost sight of it.”

“For the sake of Brave Little Belgium,” said the subaltern addressed as Joey.

“Don't you believe it! Not for Belgium. *Nor* for England's honour and the glory of the sea.”

“You wanted to swank about with a sword,” Tony proposed, over a match and a cigarette.

“God, no. I'm not such a fool as that. I don't think a sword's a fine thing: it's really rather a disgusting knife. But it's a jolly one. . . . Ah, that's it, Doc! I remember now, I thought to myself when they talked all their hot air about ‘Who lives if England die,’ I thought: ‘Hughes, my boy, here's fun going. Here's a chance of fighting Germans and Turks, both of whom seem quite good fellows—which is a pity—but there you are: fighting's fun, and one may not be offered another such opportunity. Better take it. It isn't often one's offered the chance of killing as many people as possible, and being praised for it instead of being hanged.’ Have some more whisky. . . . So we all rushed in, and I've

not decided yet whether we made bloody fools of ourselves or not."

"Of course we did," said Graham, with brisk cheerfulness; and Tony knew that he said it, not out of a clear intellect like Hughes Anson's, but because it was the fashion to talk like that.

"Well, I don't know." The Roseate Hughes shook his head doubtfully. "So far, to tell the honest truth, the war hasn't disappointed me; it's been pretty unsavoury sometimes, but on the whole I've enjoyed it. Yes, it's a good war; and I shall go on enjoying it to the end; wherefore Steward! Steward! bring some more whisky. . . ."

Now the Doctor spoke. He was an older man than any of the others, and quieter; the only man who had been long enough in his profession for it to stamp its peculiar lines upon his face and give its peculiar tones to his voice.

"I don't agree with you, that our motives for joining the army were purely selfish. They were mixed, no doubt, but there was something of decency about them."

"Oh, no," Graham demurred. "Oh, no! Surely not."

"Shut up, Graham," commanded Hughes. "How do you mean, Doc?"

"Well, in my own case," said the Doctor diffidently. "I weighed it up, and I was satisfied that, all things considered, the Allies' cause was a bit better than the Germans'—"

"Oh, granted, granted," Hughes Anson allowed. "But would it have made any difference to you if you had decided the opposite? It wouldn't have to me. I'm not fighting for the Allies because they're in the right, but because I enjoy it. It's fun to have a side and to play like hell for it. I'm quite clear that war's a crime, but also that, like all other crimes, it's colossal sport. But when it comes to hanging up my sword on my study wall, after the war, and being hugely proud of it—well, I'm not going to be such a humbug as that. . . . All you louts are going to hang up your swords, aren't you, and tell your children about St. Crispin Crispin's Day."

"Why not," laughed Tony, whose intelligence was the quickest to see a flaw in the argument. "It may be humbug, but it'll be fun."

"Ah! Ah, ha!" exclaimed Hughes Anson. "O'Grogan thinks he has caught me out. But he hasn't. And the reason is that I happen to be one who doesn't enjoy humbug—not

because I'm noble, but because the truth is generally so much more amusing. So shall I tell you what I am going to do with my sword, O'Grogan?"

"Please do," Tony invited.

"I'm going to have a ring fixed to its point, and I am going to attach that ring to a chain that dangles from a certain little cistern in a certain little retired room in my house; and I shall be able to pull the handle of my sword every morning after breakfast."

This greatly pleased the others, who roared with laughter and vowed to do likewise.

More and more drinks came on the steward's tray, and at last Hughes Anson announced that he had got up a glow worthy of a birthday, so now the whole family party must go out into the garden to do physical jerks. Most willingly they marched after him, in single file and stamping rhythmically, Tony No. 2 in the file—out on to the deck, where no glimmer of light was allowed lest a German eye should be sweeping the ocean. They performed—well, who could say what they were performing in that unrelieved darkness? One heard the voice of The Roseate Hughes yelling every command he could remember: "Knees up! . . . Get 'em up, that fellah! . . . On the toes, rise. . . . *Wait* for it now—*wait* for it! . . . Knees, bend! . . . Stretch! . . . *Put that light out!* . . . Bend-er. . . . Stretch-er. . . . Bend-er. . . . (Stop that guffawing!) Arms *b'upp!*" Then it would seem he was manœuvring them as a platoon and getting them hopelessly entangled, for Tony was bumped into and cursed by half a dozen, and he bumped and cursed them back, while the Instructor roared: "Damn it! As you were, men. Damn it! As you were."

God help us, but marching was simpler than this. "Form two deep. Form fours! Right! March at ease. Lift 'em up now! . . . Lift 'em up!"

And they were stamping round the deck, and breaking into a song, which was sternly suppressed by the voice of their Instructor. A few seconds later, however, the milk of human kindness stirred in him and he commanded: "Sing, damn you, sing!" And on went the rhythmic column, bellowing, "It's a long way to Tipperary," not for love of the song, but in high ridicule of it, because it was the song the newspapers had foisted on to them. Three times round the deck their Instructor marched them, and then straight into the Smoking-room again, where he halted his parade in front of a table

and shouted: "Stand at ease! Stand easy! Sit, you devils; sit and drink."

It may have been after the third drink, or after the fourth that The Roseate Hughes decided that he was hungry and needed eggs and bacon. And at once all resolved to go down into the bowels of the ship and disinter the cooks and demand eggs and bacon. In a riotous cataract they flowed down the stairways, and along the narrow alleyways, and into a clutter of stewards who, it appeared, were laying the breakfast tables before turning in to sleep. As the spokesman of his party, Hughes explained in a rather thick voice what was the matter. "Egg-sheer-bacon," he said. "Egg-sheer-bacon f'r fifteen."

The stewards protested that it would be quite impossible to produce eggs and bacon at this hour.

And The Roseate Hughes demanded of his deputation if they would be content with anything less, and they shouted "*No!*" as men shout who are asked if they will suffer their liberties to be taken from them.

So their leader could do nothing but turn again to the stewards and ask: "J'hear that? These are fierce men—stou' fellers. Can't answer f' what they'll do if they're thwarted; no, nottifer thwarted. Nottifer thwarted." It was a good phrase, and worth repeating. "Nottifer thwarted."

The Saloon Steward appeared, and, being a good, smiling, tolerant fellow, offered them anything in a cold line: some ham sandwiches or a slice of tongue or some galantine of turkey: but no, they were men to whom compromise was a dishonour, and Hughes Anson explained that it was his birthday. They began a rhythmic monotone, "We-want-eggsher-bacon. We-want-eggsher-bacon. We want eggsher-bacon . . ." and heads came out of cabin doors, and half-dressed, curious stewards hurried up to learn the nature of the disturbance; and soon the Master-at-Arms appeared, looking extraordinarily like a fireman in fatigue dress. When Hughes Anson saw this functionary in front of him, he stared at him with gaping admiration, then seized the cap off his head, clapped it on his own, and, thus dressed in a brief authority, went knocking on door after door along the alleyway, and calling: "Open up, in the name of the Lord!"

But just then a rumour flitted like a moth against his incandescent brain that someone had gone to fetch the

O.C. Troops, or the Adjutant, or some other fount of discipline, and, on being told this, he inquired abruptly, "Wosshay? Wosshay?" The tale was repeated. "Why then Dismiss!" he roared, with his admirable logic.

And they all scattered into various parts of the ship, and were seen no more.

But Tony was not with them, then. He had taken a drink to cool himself after the physical jerks; had laid down his glass rather stealthily, and slipped away to the dark deserted deck. Homesickness had ousted high spirits again; a seed from Hughes Anson's talk was germinating discomfort in his mind. This was Rosy's denial that, in the last analysis, there was anything but selfishness in fighting for England. Somehow it made him want to get away into solitude, there to think about his wife, and about those first days of the war, when he had glimpsed something of beauty in escaping from petty personal disappointments into the service of a cause that was larger than himself. So to his favourite stance for'ard on the promenade deck, where he could look down upon the men lying on the hatches below.

For the men, having nothing but the hot and headachy places of the ship for their dwelling, were spread as usual beneath the stars. The mandoline-player, under the soft influences of the night, was playing hymns: and in these still seas he might have been a gondolier playing his guitar on the waters of the Grand Canal. From a Music-room somewhere behind Tony came the noise of a group of officers singing in ribald chorus round a strummed piano: "There's the call of the pibrochs. The marching of men!" How they gloried in ridiculing "the call of the pibrochs!" And then with a pathetic vibrato they trilled: "The echoes are waking on forest and scar; 'Tis Angus my own . . . Angus my own . . . Coming home from the *wab*! . . ."

And all his years had led to this: to a troopship which was fast bearing him to a battle where the average life of a soldier was fourteen days. He stood here alone, his friends and his family behind him, and getting farther and farther behind him, as the ship went on. Perhaps Keatings and Joyce and Derek and Peggy were forever behind him, like yesterday's sun that

dropped astern. And Honor too. They had all been steps to this high starlit deck.

Honor. Honor whom he loved, but not as he had wished to love. And here he was only two days' journey from her, and missing her. Only two days, and he had not felt such a love for her, and such a need of her, since the days of his elopement. This was good ; there was a spring of happiness in the heart of his homesickness. No other woman seemed so desirable to-night. Honor was his own, his woman's body granted to him . . . and at the thought of her fresh young beauty his own body stirred. This was wonderful ; the return of the old love so quickly.

Strange how his nature seemed to sink to rest, now that he suspected he was loving again. He felt secure and happy and free. Now to deal with Hughes Anson ! . . .

And soon he was equipping himself with a hundred arguments to offer Hughes Anson in the morning.

Smoking and thinking, he dawdled there ; till the ship became empty of sound, though lapped about by the sigh of her own movement through the water.

"Well, well," thought he ; "time to go to bed ; " and he swung round and walked to his berth.

And soon all the five thousand souls in that ship, except for the few watchers, were within her walls and asleep, while she, without a light showing anywhere, forged onward through the night seas, a high, dark shadow and a sound.

CHAPTER II

THE SHIP GOES ON

THE ship awoke in the Mediterranean. Tony, unable to sleep in the thickening heat of his cabin, had dragged a mattress on to the deck and dropped asleep beneath the maternal caress of a slight head-wind; and now he was awakened by no less majestic a valet than the sun, which had climbed up its stairs and was gazing into his eyes. He blinked at it: yes, there it was, right ahead of the ship's bows; then the ship must be steering due east. Sitting up, he saw on the starboard quarter, a long, grey, well-defined shadow. Africa. He jumped to his feet. Happiness and well-being were strangely aglow in his body, for his last thoughts the previous night had been happy. And here was a new happiness, to find the Mediterranean all about him.

And all the day was full of entertainment. The Mediterranean being a different theatre from the Atlantic, the programme was changed. Ships passed them now, and one and all flew the red ensign of the British Merchant Service, till the officers declared they were sick of this flag, and would have welcomed the colours of another nation. So high-handed the Navy had been! Hospital ships passed them, homeward bound from Gallipoli: each a lovely vessel in dazzling white, with the red cross of mercy at three points along her hull, and a narrow ribbon of green all round. And the trooper herself, on this sun-baked morning, had changed: her cargo of men was no longer in the sombre hues of the North, but in the gay wear of the tropics. When the soldiers paraded for inspection, lo! they were all in light drill uniforms and sand-coloured Wolseley helmets.

At eleven o'clock in the Sergeants' Mess Tony was inoculated against typhoid; and as he was almost at once incapacitated in the left arm and shoulder, he regarded this savage proceeding as his first wound of the war. They told him that

they had infused an army of about 3,000,000 germs into him; and he prayed that this host, which was not inconsiderable, had been enlisted for the duration of the war and would need no reinforcements. So unpleasant did the pain become that Tony, being quick, like every healthy male, to fear a serious issue to his disorders—even a fatal issue—wondered how he could get a doctor's opinion without appearing to seek it. His thought fell upon that quiet, middle-aged, likeable fellow, Lieutenant Wilmington, who had been one of Hughes Anson's guests last night; and finding him in a chair reading "*Ordeal by Battle*," he suggested a walk round the decks in pursuit of an appetite for lunch; and very gradually on that walk he hinted at his present remarkable suffering, and learned from Wilmington that it was all quite correct, and that he would probably feel much worse by the evening.

Now, next to a conversation in the dark between two men sharing the same bedchamber, there is no talk more certain to arrive at intimacy and confidences than the talk which accompanies two men on their walk round a deck. Wilmington was soon telling the story of his own life, and telling it with manifest humility and sincerity, to abolish Hughes Anson's contention that men's ultimate motives were selfish. He spoke of his labour in building up a Harley Street practice, and of his success in the end. He said that his income for some years past had kept in the vicinity of £8,000 a year, and he hinted that it had been no easy thing to throw it up and take instead the two "pips" of an R.A.M.C. Lieutenant, with the screw which attached to them of about £400 a year. Especially as the practice, if deserted by him, could hardly be built up again, because it was almost wholly a personal matter. Frankly, old man, he had held back from what seemed his duty for eleven months because his wife had expensive tastes and his two boys were at an expensive school. But at last when he read of the appalling sickness at Gallipoli and heard the cry for more and more doctors, and especially for doctors of experience, and when he realized that his specialist knowledge was just what was wanted in these Middle East campaigns, he had scrapped everything and volunteered for Gallipoli. "I don't pretend to be anything more than a very ordinary person, with no bias whatever towards self-sacrifice—on the contrary, a very strong bias the other way—but I simply felt I had to do this, old man, and I did it. And,

O'Grogan, isn't it funny how satisfied one feels after a move like that?"

Tony nodded profoundly: he suggested that, though Hughes Anson was marvellously clear-sighted over the range of his own experience, there were some experiences, old man, of which he knew nothing.

And so to lunch.

Dared one admit that the Mediterranean was becoming monotonous? Day after day the heavens declared the glory of God, and the firmament showed His handiwork; and it palled. So much so that, on the second day out from Malta, Hughes sought relief in a long talk with Tony on Sex.

"Come and I'll tell you all about it," he said.

And with his accustomed frankness, Tony sitting beside him in a deck chair, he gave an outline of his sexual life; and the Mediterranean went by unheeded; for environment is apt to go out, like the garden view from the windows, when men light up their heads with this, their brightest topic.

"Yes, I've had more women in my life than I can remember the names of," said Hughes, staring at the smoke of his pipe. "I suppose that shocks you."

"You mean before your marriage, I suppose?" Tony asked.

"No. Since."

Tony remained thoughtful.

"Oh, I know what you're thinking," continued Hughes. "Didn't I say to you the other night that I loved my wife better than any other woman? Well, that stands. That's the gospel truth. She's top-of-the-bill with me—I want you to understand that—the one woman who really matters. But when I'm away from her for a long time, what then, old bird? I don't cease to be attracted by pretty women, and if they are easy fruit, well, I'm afraid I pick 'em; they seem to want me to do this kindness, and I'm very happy to oblige them. Is that very wrong?"

"I dunno," said Tony.

"If it's Nature's game to push me towards them, and them towards me, right-ho! I am very pleased to fall in with her ideas. Suits me down to the ground . . . You see, quite often I take a trip to the States for the good of my firm, and on

a ship we are all of us at rather a loose end for something to do. Well, it's emphatically something to do. Once I was on the *Northumbria*, the sister ship to this old hooker, and good lord! the number of women on that voyage that raped me!"

"What!" screamed Tony. "What the devil do you mean?"

"Just what I say: 'raped.' There was no mistaking what they wanted, and Barkis was willing; but, devil take it! I was quite exhausted by the time we made New York."

Such a conversation is not easily stopped; it filled hour after hour that morning, playing round the head of one of them at least with a disturbing light—a light that was brilliant with interest and yet darkened with discomfort, like the light of an evening when the afterglow has lagged too long. He remembered other such talks ten years ago with old Raking, in green, secluded places by the Thames. Then, abruptly, the officers' mess call guillotined the debate, and they saw the Mediterranean again. The ship had been moving on all the while, taking them away from the places where women were; perhaps away from women for ever.

In the afternoon when the sun appeared to be plumb overhead, Tony, his thoughts still tinted with this conversation, took a writing-block and fountain pen into a shaded recess, and floated happily away along the surface of a letter to Honor.

"2nd Lieut. A. O'Grogan,

"British Mediterranean Expeditionary Force,

"August, 1915.

"Dearest Honor,

"How are you going, and God bless you. Such is my wish, sent with all my heart from a boat I am not at liberty to name, sailing in the blue Mediterranean over a spot I may not say where. Dearest, I keep on feeling that my departure from Waterloo was so hurried that I could only say about half of what I felt, but in case through pressure of work, which has at present recoiled *pour mieux sauter* ('Oui, oui,' says Honor, to show that at least she recognizes the language), I should omit to say it later, let me say it here and now, 'At home or away, in England or out of it, ashore or afloat, you are the elemental fact of my life—absolutely top of its bill—the one thing that really matters. For which take all my thanks.'

"And here, since we are getting a trifle pathetic, we all blow our noses and start afresh.

"I wish you were here with me looking at all the loveliness around. A little while ago we sighted a grey island behind the diaphanous haze, and now as we draw nearer to it, Proximity, like an artist completing the picture, is adding colour and shadow and detail to what was merely a pencilled impression before. He has put white specks on the slopes; they might be spotless sheep, but are really buildings scattered apart. Oh yes, we are getting nearer and can even see a toy yacht floating with a swan-like grace and whiteness. This elegant plaything is coming in our direction, and what ho! it is a great three-masted, full-rigged sailing ship bearing down upon us—

"I stopped at this point to watch it go by. It heaved past our bows and swept round our stern, as though it had skirted us for the whim of the thing. And now it has dwindled away to the west, and become a toy craft again.

"It is lovely weather; warm, to be sure; quite warm so that I often use the blotting paper of this writing-block to blot my forehead.

"And there are no parades for the tommies to-day. Too hot. They lie about the decks and joke and sing. A shy fellow with a mandoline has bidden himself in some modest retreat and is thrumming the songs we sang in our last months at home: and of course the fellows can't help joining in and the volume of one chorus after another blows over the sea to the mountains yonder, each crossing a more easterly patch—for the boat moves fast.

"It seems to have brought us much nearer to the fight during the last days. We see cruisers haring along with the noses of their guns outstretched, as if sniffing the trouble in front. And heading the other way come the hospital ships, taking the wounded home. Yesterday one passed very near us, and we could see her upper decks packed with sisters and nurses and V.A.D.s (Isn't the official army word 'sister' wonderful?) These delightful girls never ceased waving their handkerchiefs to our crowd of khaki lads, who returned the greeting somewhat shyly. But when the wounded in the bows of the hospital ship roared out: 'Are we down-hearted?' there was nothing at all shy about our uproarious answer 'No!' I could swear that, in the noise of it, the beautiful white vessel trembled.

"I'm quite anxious to get into the fight, and only hope that this new landing at Suvla Bay won't polish off all the Turks before we can get to Gallipoli. You've read all about the Suvla landing, I suppose: the general feeling is that it'll cut the communications of the Turkish army at Cape Helles and force it to retreat; then our Helles army and our new Suvla army will join up and rush the hills

that overlook the Dardanelles ; and once we command the forts of the Dardanelles, the Navy can go romping through to Constantinople.

" Yes, we're all very confident ; especially the men. By the way, the more I see of these fellows, these simple, common men of England, the more I believe that in days to come I shall be very proud of having been allowed to command them.

" I may write more to-morrow, but good-bye for the present, darling. . . . Write at frightful length."

A night and a day passed, and in the little Writing-room, under bright electric lamps, Hughes Anson sat at a table censoring the tommies' letters. As he signed each envelope he tossed it on to a pile of letters on the carpet. At another table sat Wilmington, performing precisely similar actions. Only a wall's thickness separated these two men from the Smoking-room, whence came the noise of young men's voices cheering and singing. One clear young voice sounded above the others, and it cried, " Wait a minute, all ! " and there were three seconds of silence, followed by a piano and the clear young voice singing alone :

" Oh, the moon shines bright on Charlie Chaplin,
His boots are crackin'
For want of blackin'
And his little baggy trousers they want mendin'
Before we send him——"

and all together the voices roared : "*To the Dardanelles !*"

" Oh, the moon shines bright on Mrs. Porter
And on her daughter——"

But now Tony burst from the deck into the Writing-room and cried to Hughes and Wilmington :

" It's Lemnos, you blighters ! Lemnos, my hat ! The fabled isle ! Why on earth don't you come out and watch ? "

" Run away, run away," said Hughes, and explained that he had rashly promised to help out the Lancashire officers with their censoring, since every tommy on the ship had written about half a dozen last letters to-day, confound him ; and Tony inwardly observed, as he had observed before, that the

unmoral Hughes would very often put himself out to help someone else. Hughes added, with perhaps a sting, that Wilmington, being a gentleman, had come to his assistance. Then from a small pile of letters which he had kept apart from the mass he picked up one and read: "Dear mother, I hope this finds you as it leaves me at present, much better after feeling very sick. I felt like catting hundreds of times during the stormy weather, but managed to keep my food to myself." He put it down, commenting, "There's been no stormy weather." He picked up another: "Dear Mollie, I hope this finds you as it leaves me at present, absolutely in the pink. Well, here we are, practically in sight of the trenches"—("Can you see 'em, O'Grogan?")—"and, crikey! I'm sorry for any old Turks your loving husband sets his eyes on. Now keep your pecker up, old girl, we ain't going to be long out here, which, since this here Suvla landing, we expect to be over by Christmas, so give my love to our Sis. . . ." This he put down without comment. "And here's another. A religious bloke, this one; I happen to know him, a young giant of about six-foot-six. He is writing to his father. Listen: 'We're just on top of the battle now, Dad, but I mind your last words to me, "All things work together for good to them as love God. . . ."' "

"Can we see the boom yet?" said Wilmington.

And Tony said, No, they were just rounding a brace of priceless little Hans Andersen islands which, as far as he could see, were doing sentry-go at the entrance to the harbour.

"Well, come and see us again when we're through the boom, and we can pull up the blinds then," said Wilmington.

"Yes," Hughes endorsed, deep in his letters. "Good-bye, and thank you for calling."

Tony retreated with abuse.

Perhaps a quarter of an hour went by, and suddenly Hughes swung round in his chair and stood up.

"Well, I've finished," he said. "I think I shall go and get tight."

"So?" inquired Wilmington.

"Yes, Doc. It may be my last respectable blotto . . . or even my last altogether, come to think of it."

"Oh, no, no. That I can't believe," the doctor protested.

"Yes," Hughes affirmed sadly. "It might be—we're

getting altogether too close to this disgusting war. Now, this dangerous Gallipoli spot—how far is it from Lemnos ? ”

“ About forty miles.”

“ Hell ! is that all ? ” He grimaced. “ And they put us into little ferry-boats and ferry us there ? ”

“ At ten o’clock to-morrow morning. Or to-night, if it’s not too late.”

“ Well, now, isn’t that damnable ? . . . ”

He was apparently contemplating its damnableness when Tony broke into the room again.

“ We’re through the boom, children. Up with the blinds and see the sights of Lemnos.”

They opened the deadlights, and the lamps of the room illuminated the deck without. It was almost a ceremony, blessing the end of a voyage. Open them up ; hurrah ! our ship has run the gauntlet of the enemy submarines and is now coming triumphantly into port ! Open them up : no submarine can touch us now !

And the opened ports showed them that they were surrounded by lights ; shipping lights on a wide stretch of water, and innumerable other lights on the rolling hills around.

“ ’Struth ! ” exclaimed Hughes.

“ Quite a lot of people here,” said Tony.

They stood gazing. Instead of being in the hill-locked gulf of a little unwanted island, lost in the Aegean, they might have been in the world’s largest harbour, with all the world’s shipping at anchor, and the world’s largest city rising from the water front.

“ J’ever see so many ships ? ” murmured Hughes.

“ No ; and what are all the lights ashore ? ”

“ They can’t be buildings.”

“ Camps, with their hurricane lanterns.” Hughes, the only one who had been to war, was prompt with his explanation. “ Probably Rest Camps and Concentration Camps and Remounts and Ordnance, and God-knows-what-all. Those with the two lights swinging on their masts are the hospitals—damn em.”

“ We are slowing down, aren’t we ? ”

“ Yes, we’re going to anchor.”

“ Hallo ! . . . ” This was an exclamation from Tony. “ Hallo, look ! here’s a little boat crowded with soldiers. It’s coming our way.”

"It's the Gallipoli Ferry," said Hughes.

And at the same moment all the young officers came funnelling out of the Smoke-room, and lined along the rails to see and to banter the little Peninsula ferry as she passed. Hughes, Wilmington and Tony hastily joined them. The height of the liner's hull gave them an aeroplane view of the little steamer; they could look down upon her in her completeness—bows and poop, mast and rigging and funnel—as if she was a model in the dimly lit window of a Shipping Office. All her decks were packed with soldiers; and at such a sight the young officer who had led the chorus in the Smoke-room shouted, "You people! Who are you?"

"Kent Yeomanry."

"Oh, you're no good—we'll be along to-morrow and give you a lift."

"Yes, you tell 'em the Lancashires have arrived," shouted Tony. "Shock troops, what?"

"And s'more of the Essex," yelled Hughes.

"Eh, it's a poor look-out for Johnny Turk now," agreed the ferry.

"I say, there's three submarines waiting for you outside," yelled Hughes, "we've just seen them."

All the field-glasses were now turned the other way, for the ferry had passed. The leading voice yelled, "Are we down-hearted?" and from over the intervening water came the loud roar, "No!" The leading voice made one last effort to reach her over the lengthening distance, "Well, *au revoir*. Put it across 'em," and from the decks below, where the massed tommies were also firing their broadside of banter, came the last of their shouts, "Well, 'op it, you b——s. Sorry you can't stop."

That was over. The young officers rushed back to the Smoke-room, singing in chorus under their irrepressible leader:

"The echoes are waking on forest and scar,
'Tis Angus my own coming home from the war!"

There was a restlessness on the ship that night, a coming and going around the blackboard of notices outside the Purser's Office, and, between these visits, an uneasy killing of time. Some drank and made merry; some wrote letters; some played

cards rather silently. Others packed. A padre held a hymn-singing service on the foc'sle among the men, and appeared to be enjoying a success beyond anything he had achieved during the voyage. Tony, as all the others, was aware of an emptiness within, and an excited trembling which forbade him to be still or inactive. And at last, near ten o'clock, Orders appeared on the blackboard, long, closely-typed sheets of Orders; and one could scarcely approach them for the crowd. Into Tony they shot a little arrow that left a worrying wound. As a supernumerary officer of the Lancashires, he was not to proceed with his brigade; he was seconded instead to the Essex Division and would proceed with their drafts in the morning.

Not to go with his own battalion! To have to join some rotten new division, and be the nervous "new boy" all over again! Oh, damn! As all people do in such moments, he sought for the names of his friends to see what the powers had done for them. This brought comfort, for Orders reminded him that Hughes Anson was one of the Royal West Essex. Oh, well, perhaps he would be able to get into the same battalion with Rosy: Rosy would be his bear-leader at the new school. And Wilmington, what of him? Wilmington, as an unattached M.O., was to report to the D.A.D.M.S., 162nd Division, Cape Helles. Same division, anyhow. Ah, he and Wilmington could at least travel to Cape Helles together. "Two days' Iron Rations and water-bottles to be full on arrival," said Orders. H'm, didn't sound as comfy as the ship's Dining Saloon.

So the next morning Tony, who must wait for a later ferry, was standing by the deck-rail and watching the men of his old brigade file down the gangway on to a little steamer, which had lashed itself against the huge troopship. Loaded with equipment, packs and overcoats, they stumbled down the narrow decline and on to the new deck, casting back jibes and laughter.

"Eh, but we're real soldiers now, lads. . . ."

"Eh, we're *for* it now, alrect. . . . T' half of us'll be dead this time to-morrow, tha knows. . . ."

"Well, hell's already full of Germans, so there won't be no room for us. . . ."

"Good old British Empire!"

"What do I care for the British Empire? I'd sell it for five bob. . . ."

"Aye, so would I, and all. . . ."

"Yah! British Empire's no bloody good; getting us potted at by Turks like this! . . ."

"Any more for the *Skylark*? . . ."

"Coom along, th' lads! Toopence t' ride t' Helles. . . ."

"It's a far, far better thing I do now than I have ever done——"

"Eh, get a move on, choom! Your King and Country needs you——"

"——and I go to a far, far better rest than I have ever known. . . ."

"*Gott strafe England!*"—this from a lance-corporal who had got his equipment entangled with a cleat; "Gaw, this is war, this is! . . ."

"Aye, I *have* got wind oop, and all; it's better nor a dose o' salts this is. . . ."

"Here! *bold* that shovin'! . . ."

"Coom on, Sweeney, lad; taxi's at t' door; no swinging the lead now; tha's asked for this, tha knows. . . ."

"Look at 'im! why didn't he bring his bloody bedstead as well?"

"'Ere! give us room, mate; I've paid my passage as well as you."

The boat was full; as crammed with soldiers as a market cart is crammed with potatoes; the shrouds shot upwards from a tumbled soil of pith helmets. Her siren shrieked, her engines chunked, her crew unlashed her, and she laboured away, the men bellowing to those still left on the liner, "Eh, you scrimshankers! You come along too and do your bit. . . ."
"Goo'-bye. . . ." "Gaw! it ain't 'alf rough aht here. . . ."
"Goo-bye-ee! Goo-bye-ee!"

More boats came and carried off the remainder of Tony's brigade and some of the Essex too, Hughes Anson among them. Then a quiet. Wilmington and Tony, as unattached officers, turned about and, going indoors, found themselves on a troopship nearly empty, its stewards sweeping away the last traces of the men who had been here. The alleyways were littered with sheets pulled off the bunks of departed guests. A blackboard lolled against the door of the Lounge, giving the results of yesterday's Sweep. And the Lounge itself was as melancholy as a stage-set when the play's over and the curtain down.

"Cigarette?" offered Tony.

"Thanks," said Wilmington.

They sat down ; and the smoke lifted from their cigarettes ; and it was the only thing happening in the Lounge.

"Doc," said Tony at last : he was thinking of the way the men had left the ship, in no high Roman fashion, but in an odd way of their own, jesting and half ashamed.

"Yes," Wilmington encouraged him.

But Tony did not speak at once. The Irishman in him wanted to speak—to burst out in a really emotional utterance, but his good English censor was sitting on the trap-door, whispering, "It simply isn't done. Haven't you just seen that it isn't? If you speak, you'll be doing the very opposite of that which you admire. Lie down, lie down." None the less the Irishman burst up.

"Doc," said he, "what have we really come to fight for? It's not exactly the Empire. . . . I've an idea that England isn't fighting for the Empire so much as the Empire—in a foggy kind of way—is fighting for England."

Wilmington frowned at the smoke of his cigarette, not liking this sort of talk at all ; but since politeness seemed to demand an answer, he began : "My own view——"

But Tony was not interested in the doctor's view ; he wanted to state his own (he was an Irishman) ; and his eyes were staring ahead of him.

"And by 'England' I mean"—he shrugged in the difficulty of expressing himself—"something that she stands for—despite all her faults—and something that seems worth suffering for. . . . I was trying to get it all into a poem the other night, but failed. The idea's so damned elusive. My idea was, I think, that we fought for England, not because she was a huge Empire, but for the very opposite reason—because she was a very little country—a country where—probably because it was all so small and neighbourly—they had raised a tradition of toleration and liberty . . . and humour and kindness . . . and—and trustworthiness. But I couldn't get beyond the opening lines, which went :

'Here fight I for England. Why, God knows !
Her byres and her hedgerows know,
And all her gentle hills. . . .'

"But——" began Wilmington.

"And this particular Gallipoli business, Doc—interrupting you for a moment—this particular Gallipoli stunt has absolutely

got me. It's so—it's so wonderful. Gallipoli is the one bloody inspiration we've had. On the Western front we're absolutely held by the Germans ; but, by gad ! only let us storm away to Constantinople through the Dardanelles, and we shall—we shall do everything : we shall cut the road to India, we shall knock Turkey out of the war, we shall—we shall save Russia and bring in all the Balkans on our side, and put the final breeze up Austria and—and—and end the war——”

“ And now,” said Wilmington, “ suppose you let me have a go.”

“ I'm beastly sorry,” said Tony, abashed. “ Have I been talking about myself ? I say, I'm frightfully sorry.”

“ Well, I was only going to say that, for my part, I hadn't thought out any of these things. I only know—as I told you the other day that it's rather decent to be needed somewhere, and to have given up something to get there.”

Tony nodded in appreciation. “ Yes, I suppose it is. . . . *I'm* giving up nothing really. You see, I wanted to go from the first. And incidentally I'm getting a much better salary than I had as a prep-school master. With my pay, and Field and Fuel and Light allowances, I shall draw over three hundred pounds a year.”

“ So much ? ” laughed Wilmington.

“ Yes, but I've never had much, you see. Parsons' sons don't.”

“ No, I suppose not.”

“ I wonder if we shall see old Rosy Hughes again.”

“ Probably.”

“ Hope so.”

There was silence.

“ Well, I'll be packing my valise, I think,” said Wilmington, rising.

Tony rose too. “ So'll I. And I say, Doc, ‘ Two days' Iron Rations and water-bottles full ! ’ ”

“ It sounds ominous,” said the Doc.

CHAPTER III

ACTIVE SERVICE

A TRAWLER carried Wilmington and Tony to the Gallipoli Peninsula, a dirty little snuffing trawler from Grimsby. Trawler 294. It puffed out of Lemnos, with the harbour still dark, but day coming grey in the offing. And as the bright August morning swept over the sea, they saw that the trawler was heading for a little hilly island, Imbros; and Tony looked eagerly towards it, for here in his H.Q. sat the Commander-in-Chief, watching over the water his battles on Gallipoli. They were quickly beneath its hills, in a little open bay, where two cruisers floated at anchor, and some ferries and trawlers, and a monitor—perhaps the very one that had passed them in the Mediterranean. Ashore were the tents of the Great Men, and Tony stared at them. He hoped, maybe, that he might see the great Sir Ian Hamilton himself walking in contemplation, up and down, up and down. . . . On the cliff-head was a hangar of brilliant green tarpaulin; and out of its doors, soon after they had entered the bay, an airship floated, to hover gracefully over the shipping.

They took some officers and "Other Ranks" aboard, and turned their bows to the east. Now they were facing Gallipoli itself: there in the pearly mist, only seven miles ahead, rolled the hills of that terrible land. How peaceful she seemed, lying low and gentle in her sparkling seas! But look, hard behind her sweep of hills, there was a second land, with a vaguer outline switchbacking along the whole width of the sky; and instantly this brought home to Tony the narrowness of the Gallipoli Peninsula and of the Dardanelles Straits beyond, for this was the face of Asia. Gallipoli in a panorama before him! He remembered a July day in England, when he had read Sir Ian's narrative of the far-away army that had stormed

Gallipoli from the sea; of that old collier, the *River Clyde*, grounding on V Beach with her hold full of men; of the Lancashires rushing through the blizzard of bullets up the slope of W Beach; and of the Australians and New Zealanders charging up the hills of Anzac Cove "straight at their bayonets." He remembered an hour in the Mediterranean when they had heard the tale of the Suvla landing—more and more British divisions coming out of the sea to join hands with the Anzacs and attempt the hills above—oh, which of those infolding bays was Suvla, and which of those shadowed ravines was Anzac Cove?—and as he deliberately recreated these moments, and the eager desire that had come upon him then to gaze upon the sites of the battles, he shut his eyes and imagined himself being transported by an Arabian genie over the thousands of miles—now he opened his eyes—to a ship in the Aegean that was flying towards his desire.

While he was thus meditating, the trawler's calm fermented into excitement. Not a cable's length away, a Turkish floating mine was passing. It was a huge black iron ball bristling with spikes, like the head of a giant's club. No doubt it had come drifting from the Narrows, let loose that it might take its chance of winning anything from a warship of 1,000 souls to a trawler with 2nd Lieutenant O'Grogan aboard. The skipper on his bridge put the helm so that his vessel veered away from the mine; and he moved the lever to "Stop." The trawler hung like a cork on the slightly-moving water. The mine had swept past her quarter and was already a little distance away. The soldiers on board loaded their rifles and, resting them on the gunwale, took aim. The ship's company, who all had ancient rifles, hurried to get them and took up good snipers' posts. The officer passengers, eager to be in the game, borrowed rifles and made good practice. The skipper on his bridge, enjoying himself thoroughly, shot in an erect position, as if his target were a sitting pheasant. Soon the trawler was spitting rapid-fire from a score of barrels; and some of the shooting was excellent, hitting the mine and rocking it, and other shooting, especially Wilmington's—who, by the way, shouldn't have been firing at all, since he was a non-combatant—was abominable, sending its bullets miles over the surface of the sea.

Every minute the mine was increasing the distance they had to shoot. But the best traditions of the sea are offensive and

not defensive, to pursue the enemy and to send him to the bottom ; so the skipper, taking his right hand from the trigger, moved his lever to "Half-speed Ahead," and put the helm hard over so that his ship turned and gave chase to the enemy. And a flag was run up the mast to signal to destroyers at Imbros of the menace afloat. A soldier, having gaped at this signal, muttered, "England expects every man this day to do his duty," and adjusted the sights of his rifle. When the trawler was again within a safe distance of the mine, the lever-bell rang, the arrow-head pointed to "Stop" and His Majesty's Trawler 294 again sent her broadside at the enemy. Many more bullets won home ; and amid a chorus of laughing cheers the mine was seen to be sinking. A few more shots were fired by those who had got their eyes in and didn't want to stop ; and then the target was no longer visible. The trawler hauled down its signal, while all aboard congratulated themselves on this glorious sea-victory, and this fresh assurance that the spirit of Nelson was not dead.

And now to Gallipoli and W Beach, the beach up which the Lancashires rushed. "No finer feat of arms," the enthusiastic Sir Ian had written, "has ever been achieved than the storming of W Beach from open boats." One could only wait to see it, silent in suspense. Oh, my God, here it was ; and one's heart hurt : the half-circle of water met a cliff on its left, a gentle incline straight ahead, and a steep slope on its right. And its water was still filled with sunken and rotting barges that had conveyed the men of Lancashire ashore. They couldn't in the hail-storm of bullets have scaled this impossible cliff, and only a few could have climbed that difficult slope ; it must have been up yonder rise that they rushed ; it was the natural route from the sea to the plateau. Oh God ! . . .

He would have changed places with no man to-day ; all stay-at-home people seemed to him luckless folk ; theirs the murk, his the sparkle and glitter : was he not standing in a trawler, off W Beach, Cape Helles ?

A jetty had been improvised by the partial submerging of old trawlers and barges ; and here they disembarked, and tramped over it into the busy population of Lancashire Landing. Their task was to find the M.L.O., and they found him in a little square room built of sandbags—one of many such, honey-combed round the amphitheatre of W Beach. He was a middle-aged man with a blue brassard on his arm.

"The Essex? Oh, yes, they are here somewhere or other. I'll give you a guide sometime or other. But I can't do it now. Busy just now. . . . No, there's no hurry. This show's going on for months yet. . . . You have a good look round and come back at, say, two o'clock, when I may be able to do something with you. The Essex? Yes, they're Krithia Nullah way, I think; you'll have to go along Princes Street to Clapham Junction. And look here, you may as well draw some rations. Here's a chit. . . . Right-ho. Good-bye. Walters, what about that canteen stuff?"

Wilmington and Tony came away, and for want of anything else to do, went to the appointed place for drawing rations. It was a cubiform store or shop whose four walls and counter were built by the accepted method of piling full ration-crates one upon another, as brick upon brick. The men at the counter lived behind walls of corned beef, biscuits, desiccated vegetables and Ideal Milk. Here at last was the house of one's fairy-tales, whose walls were built of food. Wilmington and Tony were given each about half a pound of tea, a quarter of a pound of sugar, a handful of army biscuits, a tin of marmalade, a tin of milk, a tin of bully, a cutting of bacon, a fistful of rice, a chunk of cheese, some firewood, and a page of the *Daily Mirror* full of raisins. They were not clear what to do with it all, but supposed that things were done like this on the Peninsula; and Tony opened his kitbag on a low sand-dune, and shot the things into it; so that for months afterwards dirty grains of rice, errant tea leaves and adhesive raisin pips made that bag an offence to his groping hand.

What next? Already the sun had become atrociously hot, making the sweat stream from under their helmets and the flies come in squadrons to visit it. God knew where the dust had come from, but it was coating their lips, tongues and eyelids. Their bodies cried for coolness and water, and when Wilmington perceived a little distance away some men bathing, he was not slow to indicate them to his companion. Now, the two arms of the little cove known as W Beach are Cape Tekke to the west and the immortal Cape Helles to the east; and it was under Cape Helles that the men were bathing, that August day of 1915. No man but would wish to say that he had bathed off Cape Helles, so away went the two friends along the beaten track to the site of this pastime. And the little spit of rocks which they chose for their disrobing place, all those

years ago, was surely the spot where, in the peaceful days before the war, the youngest Turks from Seddul Bahr would wander in search of play. Such fine slabs of sea-washed rock there were, on which they could lie and be lapped by the water; such nestling pools where they could splash with their brown feet. One wonders if they are playing there now.

Tony had not been swimming long when a deafening explosion on the shore caused him to find his feet hurriedly and stare in its direction. And as he stared at the brown balloon of smoke ascending, so it appeared, from the very place where he had set his kitbag not fifteen minutes before, *look out!* there came the whining whistle of another shell. It detonated on almost the same spot, and threw up more smoke to float over the dug-outs and tents of W Beach. Another whistle and another detonation. Bits of boxes shot up with the smoke into the air. A line of tethered mules got restive and strained at their ropes. Some whinnied. A few with a movement laughably human lay down and forbore to neigh. And Tony, standing there in the water, was agreeably surprised to find that his interest in seeing where the shells would explode was strong enough to make him forget to be afraid. Not quite realizing his danger, nor worrying what was toward, he stood there with the water up to his waist and enjoyed so remarkable an experience.

He studied the behaviour of the men ashore. They had not the least false shame about scattering to cover. And what absurd cover many of them sought; anything so long as there was *something* between them and the onrushing shells! They ran into bell tents, they hid behind a tuft of scrub they crouched behind the single post of a barbed-wire railing. And most of of the bareheaded men hastily put on their helmets.

Damn! Another shell! It exploded on the beach somewhere, and its detonation was all that the brain recorded; but immediately afterwards the surrounding noises leapt back into the foreground of consciousness: there came the voices of men:

"Gawd! I'm all in a muck-sweat. . . ."

"*That* puts the fear o' God into you, don't it? . . ."

"Ow, I never *was* a soldier and I want me mother. . . ."

"Rotten shot, Johnny! Try again, and see if you can't get your penny back."

And the song of a man as he rose from cover for the fifth

time, "Bobbing up and down like this, Bobbing up and down like this. . . ."

And these things seemed extraordinarily funny, after a shell had just missed everybody. Tony yelled with laughter. Laughter was cheap at such a moment.

A steady, a deliberate, nay, an exaggerated cachinnation of laughter drew his eyes to the rocks; and there stood Wilmington, who had long ago left the water, and was now watching Tony "bobbing up and down like this" in water as high as his waist. Tony realized how foolish he must have looked, and was making haste to bring himself and his blushes ashore, when a loud explosion shattered the air behind him. Glancing round, he saw a cloud of smoke leaving the side of a warship which had just appeared off the Cape. This British cruiser, standing remarkably close in shore, was acknowledging the receipt of the Turkish messages, and her prompt reply was most inspiring. As the tongues of flame shot from her guns he found himself saying aloud and exultantly, "That's the stuff to give 'em! Pump it over!" And she pumped it over towards Achi Baba with such address that the shriek of one shell had not died away before the next had gone shrieking after it. "That's right! Keep it up! *And* some more!" The eager words came trembling from his lips—so like the boxing matches at school was this international tourney. And he remained standing at attention in the water, till recalled to his senses by Wilmington.

"Well, that's the most remarkable bathe I've ever had," said he, paddling ashore.

At two o'clock they returned to their appointment with the M.L.O., and found him standing outside his door in parley with a corporal. On seeing them he said: "Oh lord! . . . H'm . . ." as if he had forgotten all about them. "Oh, yes . . . *you* . . . yes, I've had a message about one of you . . . O'—O'Gorgon . . . you're going to the 15th Royal West Essex, Four Eight Six Brigade . . . they don't seem to know what to do with the Mo"—"Mo" was his short way of saying "Medical Officer" or "M.O.," for he was a busy man—"but he's to report to Division."

Just then they saw the queerest little figure approaching

down the beaten path: a short, slight, little man, yet not thin, since he was bigger below the waist than above it; he was untidily dressed in gum-boots, slacks, and an old drill jacket, yet apparently he was an officer, since he wore a soft collar and tie; but nowhere was there a star or a crown to indicate his rank. He didn't even wear a Sam Browne belt. His eyes jutted out like those of a protesting fish before its death; and so did his mouth; it reminded one of a fish with jaws agape after the hook has been removed. And yet—how was it?—he was not unprepossessing: rather did he command an instant liking; as you saw him you said at once that his bark was one thing—probably a terrible thing—and his bite quite another.

The M.L.O. saw him too and exclaimed: "Ah! The very man! Here you are, you two; here's a guide. *That*, if you please, is the Four Eight Six Brigade padre—you wouldn't think so to look at him, would you?—you'd think him one of the Sanitary Squad. Padre!" he called, but the padre didn't answer, having got into an apparently wrathful conversation with a high-placed, red-tabbed officer. "He's probably come for some mess stores," explained the M.L.O. "He's Mess Secretary for Brigade Headquarters. Or he may have come to get his ticket for England. Once a week when his Brigadier or Staff Captain refuses to allow him to do something he wants to do—have Holy Communion in the front trenches, or something—he threatens to go home to England, where he can do a job of work. But he never seems to go; they stroke him down. Padre!—No, it's no good; he's ticking off Colonel Field. He's the only padre I've ever met who insults generals and privates alike. . . . *We* daren't do it. . . . Padre, damn you, come here."

The little man, having finished with the Colonel, paddled towards them in his gum-boots.

"Padre, here are two officers, one for D.H.Q. and one for B.H.Q. Will you take 'em back with you? Gentlemen, this is Captain Quickshaw."

"How often have I told you not to call me 'Captain'?" Quickshaw snapped.

"Oh, well, *Mr.* Quickshaw, then—*Padre* Quickshaw, anything you like. This is—er—what?—oh, *Wilmington*, yes—Lieutenant Wilmington, a Mo; and this is—er—O'—O'Gorham, attached to the 15th R.W.E.s."

Quickshaw nodded to them without a trace of goodwill.

"Just come from Lemnos, I suppose?" he asked.

"Yes, but we put into Imbros on the way," said Tony.

"Oh, you went to Imbros, did you? You didn't think, I suppose, to bring any fresh fruit and vegetables, or wines, from there?"

They admitted they hadn't thought of it.

"Or some eggs," added the padre vaguely. . . . "Damn, I wish I'd known you'd been coming through Imbros. The Brigadier'll get properly peevish if he has any more dried vegetables, and he's sniffy enough at any time, God knows."

"He is, Padre," agreed the M.L.O.

"Yes, but I shan't stand it much longer," Quickshaw announced; "and I told him so this morning. I didn't leave my job in England to come and look after a third-rate General's stomach."

"No, of course not, Padre," smiled the M.L.O. "Hell, no! Don't you stand it."

"I shan't. And there'll be more trouble to-night. I've just come for some mess stores, and of course the damn things haven't come. The old general'll sniff when I tell him, and he'll just sniff once too often. Let him sniff, and right-ho! very good! I shall at once bring in all the mess accounts and tell him to get on with it himself. I don't want the job."

"No, of course not, Padre. Who would? . . . but look here, can you take the Mo to D.H.Q. and O'—O'Whatever-he-is to B.H.Q.?"

"To Divisional Headquarters. Yes, I can, if I must, I suppose; but I loathe setting foot in the place. Lot of red-tabs sitting on their behinds in funk-holes! Doing nothing but make a thundering mess of the whole campaign! And with a French cook! *Paw!*" For the first time the padre laughed. "The atmosphere of the place stifles me——"

"Yes, yes, yes, yes, yes. But can you take these officers?"

"I'm going that way. They can come if they want to, I suppose. . . . Come on, *you*." This to Wilmington. "And you too, if you're coming." This to Tony.

"What about the kit?" asked Tony.

"Oh, the kit'll be brought up by a Zionist," said Quickshaw.

"I see," said Tony, who didn't see at all. He wasn't even sure if he had caught the word correctly.

"We may as well go over the plateau," the padre suggested.

"It's quite safe. There's nothing on earth happening on

Gallipoli now. We've made every mistake we possibly could, and now we're resting on our laurels."

They ascended to the Gallipoli uplands by the natural gradient, Tony secretly thrilled to think that he was treading in the steps of the men who had rushed ashore in the great April landing, and eager to see all that would come into view when they reached the higher ground. What came into view was a narrow scrub-covered plateau undulating away to the north where it finished in a low hill—no, hardly a hill—a tilt in the ground, sloping easily to the skyline.

"That's Achi Baba," said Quickshaw.

"Heavens! Is it?" exclaimed Tony, gripped with interest.

"Yes. You'd think the British Empire could take it, wouldn't you? But they haven't yet, and they won't either."

"Oh, yes, they will," laughed Wilmington.

"Will they? Thump!" said Quickshaw; which was the soldiers' way of saying, No, they wouldn't.

On their right was a large cemetery, an acre of wooden crosses; and Tony, to whom all things were new, suggested a closer examination.

"Cemeteries!" scoffed Padre Quickshaw. "You'll see all the graves you want to before you've finished here. Probably you'll fill one yourself. You'll pass a few hundreds between here and Brigade."

"All right," said Tony, consenting to follow. "And, I say, what is a—a Zionist?"

"Zion Mule Corps," answered Quickshaw tersely. "A dreadful smelly lot of cut-throats, collected from Syria or somewhere to act as transport. They trapes about with mules and gharries. Low-grade Jews, all of them."

"Any good, are they?" asked Wilmington.

"Not bad," Quickshaw allowed.

There was no exaggeration in Quickshaw's word about the graves. They were passing them always. And many thoughts they stirred in Tony, who either stopped deliberately and studied their inscriptions, or cast at them quick and guilty glances over his shoulder. On and about these graves that strong vein of sentiment which the English soldier would never speak aloud had poured itself with simplicity and without shame. Whenever possible he had dug the lonely grave of his friend under a tree, as if he wished the sleeper to have all the shade and beauty he could give him; but most of the trees were thrown

or splintered now. Often he had outlined the grave with shell-caps or cigarette tins, and sometimes he had laid the dead man's Wolseley helmet above his breast. And never had he conceived that one could put anything but a cross at the head of a grave. His wooden crosses stood over all: over his English mates, his Gurkha friends, his Turkish foes who had died in his hands, and even over his favourite dogs and horses. There was one grave on whose cross a British hand had cut the crescent of the enemy—odd mixture!—and the inscription, "A gallant Turk who died in defence of his country. R.I.P."

Wilmington, examining one of these crosses, got left behind; and Tony took the opportunity to tell Quickshaw what an excellent fellow the Mo was, and how he had left about ten thousand pounds a year so that he might go where there was a crying need for him.

"And what does he think of his reception?" asked Quickshaw.

"How do you mean?"

"Did they welcome him with open arms?"

"Not exactly."

"No. We most of us hurried out here thinking we were badly needed, and lo and behold, our first impression when we arrived on the Peninsula was that no one cared a damn whether we came or stayed away."

"Yes, that was rather my impression," admitted Tony.

"I shan't go on with it much longer," said Quickshaw, working up some indignation. "I told 'em so. Either they let me do some work, and do it more or less as I want, or back I go to my parish where there's plenty waiting. It wouldn't break my heart to leave this poisonous spot."

"Could you go if you wanted to?"

"Yes, I only signed on for a year to begin with."

"Wouldn't they think it rather—well—rather *thin* of you to go off and leave them?"

"What do I care what they think? *Paw!*" Quickshaw drew out a soiled khaki handkerchief and wiped his mouth, which was getting very moist. "I'm ready to be killed here for doing a man's job in the trenches, but I'm not going to be killed for sitting on my behind in Brigade Headquarters. Not on your life!"

"Quite," Tony endorsed.

They had been walking about an hour through the scrub and the heather when abruptly they found themselves on the rim of a deep ravine. So far down was its floor and so near its opposite side that it seemed like a fissure in Earth's crust left by some ancient earthquake. Actually it was a canyon cut by water, but bone-dry in these hot summer months. The men walking or riding in its bottom were in about the same relation to its high walls as mice to the walls of a fire-trench.

Quickshaw introduced it to them. "The Gully Ravine."

They went down its wall by a zigzag path—"The Zigzag" was its official name, painted on a signpost—and from this road they could see a long vista of the gorge. Manifestly it offered the finest concealment from Achi Baba; with the result that, where its walls were slopes of earth and scrub, instead of white cliffs, they were veined with crude paths and honey-combed with the dug-outs of the British. And all up this long ravine, as all across the plateau above, were little groups of crosses and little lonely graves. Dotted among the dug-outs of the living were the dug-outs of the dead. Truly men who at home would have shuddered before they spent the night in a cemetery may be said to have slept in one big haphazard cemetery every time they laid down to rest on Gallipoli.

Not far from the foot of the "Zigzag" was Brigade Headquarters, a chain of huts built of sacking and wood, with a bell-tent or two; and Quickshaw was just going towards them when Wilmington reminded him that it was Division that he wanted and not Brigade.

"Oh, God, yes," said the padre. "I'd forgotten about you. Well, Division's not far along the Gully. We'll get rid of you first."

They were walking along the Gully, Tony and Wilmington a little apprehensive of the spent bullets which were sighing and whining through the air, and impinging in the soft earth, but Quickshaw apparently indifferent to them. They had gone but a little way when they met a man laden with sandbags of rations, one over his shoulder, one under his arm, and a third hung from his fingers. It was an extremely awkward lading of his cargo, and just as he drew near the three officers, all the bully-beef and the Maconochie tins from the bag under his arm disgorged themselves, with a prolonged vomit, on to the road. Then the man's rain of oaths was yet more

prolonged than the decanting of the bully-beef tins: he emptied himself of all the soldiers' terms for procreation and sexual inversion, and, quitting physiology, alluded to his Saviour and to hell.

Padre Quickshaw angrily halted. Staring at the man out of those eyes of his that protruded as in a goitre, he spat and stammered his rebuke. "I can stand a good deal of foul language," said he, "but there's such a thing as going too far. Some sort of self-control is necessary, damn it all. For pity's sake cut out the blasphemies. Here you are, on this damned Peninsula, and any moment a shell-splinter may send you into the presence of your Maker, with His name befouled on your mouth. It's not good enough. It simply isn't good enough."

That same second, by an astonishing coincidence, there came the *ziff* of a spent bullet, and the man gave a cry of pain, dropped all his bags, and shot the bleeding knuckles of his right hand to his mouth.

"There!" said Padre Quickshaw. "There you are! I told you so!" Apparently his first response to this episode was a satisfaction at such a shining corroboration of his argument. "Are you hurt much?"

"Nah, it's nothin', sir," said the man. "It's only a scratch."

"Let's have a look at it. H'm. Damn nasty scratch. You can't carry all that stuff now."

"Ow, yes, I can, sir. I can carry it with me other 'and. . . . It's nothin'."

"Well, give us your First Field Dressing, and I'll bind it up."

The man produced the dressing from under the right flap of his jacket.

"You're Fred Roberts, aren't you?" asked Quickshaw, as he bound up the wound.

"Yussir."

"How's your young brother?"

"Dicky? Oh, he's all right, sir. In the pink when I last sor 'im this mornin'."

Quickshaw turned to Tony.

"This is one of your lads, O'Grogan. Fred Roberts: one of the 15th Royal West Essex."

"Oh, yes?" acknowledged Tony, and he tried to smile agreeably at the "lad," who was about forty. "I expect we shall get to know each other, Roberts."

"Yes, sir," said Fred Roberts.

Tony was not a little moved by the man's face, and attracted by it. It was such a typically London face, with its short broad nose, its strong delimited moustache, its skin so fundamentally fair beneath the weathering and the mottling, and its hair darker than such a skin suggested, and worn rather long for a soldier, and inclined to fall over the brow: just the face one would expect to see above a muffler in a London street. It was characteristic of Tony that he should immediately use this man, Fred Roberts, as a doorway to many thoughts: this man who had cursed and grumbled over a little trouble and instantly made light of a bigger one; whose expression at the moment so moved to pity—a sad and moldered expression, as if he accepted what he could not understand. One had seen the same expression in hospitals at home, or in a street-ambulance after an accident. Tony's heart went out to Fred Roberts in a frustrated compassion, as it might to a dog or a child in pain. And he opened a short conversation with him, and, learning that he worked on the railway in Southend along with his brother Dicky, was pleased to find that he had a point of contact with him, for he could ask him if he knew St. Blaise's church, where his sister Peggy was the Vicar's wife. And Fred Roberts answered with a grin that he knew the church, but its outside only.

"Yes," agreed Quickshaw. "Fred never went to church in his life, so long as it was behind a wall and he had to go through a door to it; but now that he finds that it has come into the trenches to his very elbow, he consents to attend sometimes—don't you, Fred?"

"Well yes I do, sometimes, sir," admitted Fred, perhaps a little ashamed. Embarrassed, he picked up his bags to go.

"Here! You can't manage all that junk now," said Quickshaw.

"Oh, yes, I can, sir. It's nothing much."

"Don't be more of a fool than you can help, Roberts! Of course you can't carry it all. Look here, I'll take one of these." He picked up a sack of rations. "Where's it for?"

"C Company, sir, in Trolley Ravine."

"Well, I shall probably be coming that way with this officer. I'll bring it along."

"No, sir. You can't, sir——"

"Well, then, when I'm tired of it, I'll find someone to carry it for me. I'll get it up; don't be afraid."

"Right, sir."

"Good-bye, then. And for God's sake cut out the blasphemy," added Quickshaw, returning to his attack. "Stick to 'bloody.'"

"Yessir."

"'Yessir' be hanged! You know you won't do it. Good-bye."

This friendly-quarrelsome encounter over, the officers pursued their road, Quickshaw cuddling the clumsy sack of rations under his arm. Soon they found D.H.Q., a hamlet of truly splendid bomb-proof dug-outs, terraced up a sloping side of the ravine. A tall, jolly staff officer—one guessed him to be G.S.O.1—stood at the door of his office and recognized Quickshaw.

"Mary, Mother of God!" he cried to someone inside. "Look out! Look out everybody! Here's Padre Quickshaw."

And another officer in a glorious gold-braided hat immediately looked out.

"God, so it is!" said he. "Well, we're *for* it now. What have we done?"

"Oh, and he's brought us a sack of comforts, I do believe," said the first officer. "Well, now; did you ever?"

"No, those are mess stores for his Brigadier," corrected the second. "'Feed the brute'—*what*, padre?"

"No, it's loot. Padre's been looting and he'll have to be shot. Pity; because he's a decent fellow on the whole."

Tony turned towards Quickshaw's profile, and saw that it was almost registering a grin. But the padre only said: "*Poof!* that's their idea of humour. I've not much use for it, meself."

Yet a third officer came out to entertain his eyes with a sight of Padre Quickshaw; and this was none other than D.A.D.M.S. himself, so Tony was able to witness the interview between him and Wilmington. It was simple and brief. Wilmington explained that he had been ordered to report here. The D.A.D.M.S. said: "Oh, dammit, we've had more doctors sent out lately than we know what to do with . . . *I* don't know where to put you." And he pondered over his trouble for some time. "Can you play bridge?" he asked at length.

Wilmington said he sometimes took a hand. "Well, then, you'd better go to the First Field Ambulance," said the D.A.D.M.S. happily. "I understand they want a fourth at bridge there."

"All right," said Wilmington; and shook hands with Tony, who never saw him again.

"That's Wilmington," said Quickshaw. "Now *you*." And he led Tony back to Brigade.

CHAPTER IV

THERE

NINE o'clock in the morning in Leigh Ravine, and the sun was only beginning to heat itself up for its intolerable blaze at noon. Leigh Ravine was an inward fold of the Gallipoli cliffs, with a foot-track sliding down its steep valley to an arc of beach and sea. Its two bluffs, infolding towards the track, were of different soils, the northern white, and the southern red; and the white bluff seemed to be nothing but sand and rocks, but the red had mats of coarse scrub and a few stunted firs. Each was veined with winding paths, where the feet of soldiers had trodden their tracks from the summits to the sea. On the northern and sheltered slope were one or two officers' dug-outs—wedge-shaped recesses cut in the tilted earth and roofed over with waterproof ground-sheets.

But it was nine o'clock in the morning now, and all these officers were gone to the trenches: the sea at the bottom murmured up to but one solitary figure. This was a stocky private soldier who was sitting bare-chested on a stone, while he hunted for insects in his grey-back shirt, which he was nursing across his knees. He had a rather long nose of a Roman shape, and a rather long moustache; and by a ruddiness in the one and a touch of grey in the other, and by the many lines—humorous most of them—about his eyes and nostrils and mouth, one knew him to be at least twenty years older than the majority of his companions in arms. He was forty-five perhaps, or even fifty. So far as his legs were visible under the spread shirt they appeared to be too short for his body, and slightly bowed. Frequently he brushed his wrist along his nostrils; and then, with a brush to right and a brush to left, set in order his lank unmilitary moustache. And as he laboured he sang gently. To a familiar hymn tune he sang:

“Lousy, lousy, lousy; always bally well lousy;
Lousy in the morning and lousy late at night . . .”

but he would stop the hymn each time he found a victim, that he might crack it between his two thumb-nails and mutter with a relish, "Click !"

He had just begun the humming of a new tune :

"Scratching for the dear old country,
Scratching till the blood comes through——"

when a colonel appeared at the summit of the hill, followed by two young officers and an orderly with slung rifle.

"You there!" called the colonel. "Who the devil are you?"

The soldier jumped to his feet and stood at attention, probably forgetting that his wide hairy torso was naked to the waist. One could see for certain now that his legs were short and bandy.

"Awficer's batman, sir." About his prompt answer there was something which could have come only from the pavements of London: it was deferential, and yet the deference was so rapid and obliging as to be oddly related to impudence. There was no grin on his face, but one felt that there was one somewhere behind; one felt that he enjoyed his prompt deference, as a man must enjoy any crisp imitation of the soldiers.

"Well, come and get a new officer's kit from the Western Mule Trench. It's in charge of a bloody Zionist."

"Yussir." He flung his shirt over his head and tightened his shorts with a leather belt which was decorated all round with regimental badges. "Yussir." And he hurried up the hill rather limpingly—for he had a varicose vein, or said he had.

"Come on, *you*," commanded the colonel to the officers behind.

Colonel Tappiter was a tall, heavily-built man, square-jawed and round-headed. Age perhaps fifty. Except for a flitting tenderness in his eyes he would have made an excellent cartoon of a Prussian officer, so truculent was his chin, so square his face and thick his chest: he was hardly brother to the slim grey English colonels.

"Well, Scrase," said he, speaking to the older of the officers. "I suppose you'll show O'Grogan where he can stake out a claim here, but first I'm going to take him to a higher point and show him the bloody landscape. Got a bloody batman

for him?" Colonel Tappiter used the army adjective as easily and as gratuitously as any of his men.

Scrase said that the man who had gone for the kit had been Priestley's servant.

"What's his name?"

"Wylie, sir."

"Looks a scoundrel, but I daresay he isn't."

"He's quite a good fellow, sir."

"H'm. A very slovenly one! Well, he'd better be O'Grogan's servant now. O'Grogan, your predecessor was killed here yesterday. A stray shell. Better inherit all you can from him, including his bloody servant."

"Yes, sir."

Wylie now staggered into view with Tony's valise, and the Colonel called to him:

"You there! What's your name? I've forgotten."

"Wylie, sir."

"You were Mr. Priestley's batman. Is his dug-out any good?"

Wylie cocked up a dirty thumb towards the sky.

"It's gawn up, sir."

"Oh, has it? Well, get a *jeldi* on and make a new one for this officer. . . . And you, O'Grogan, come with me. I want to show you something."

Tony followed his colonel along the Mule Trench. This trench was the main artery for the regiments holding the left of the line. Up it, either borne by mules or man-handled, went all rations, kit and ammunition. It was just wide enough for the mules, led by their swarthy Zionists or their brown, turbanned Indians, to travel in single file; and, even so, the animals, as they turned the traverses, swept with their packs the dust off the trench walls.

Colonel Tappiter walked with soldierly rapidity along it, till he turned sharply through a crevice and climbed on to a high bluff very like the one they had just left. Only it must have abutted farther into the sea, for lo! as one looked to the north, there was the coast-line of Gallipoli stretching away in a chain of bays and headlands. Softened by the distance and the morning haze, they appeared to be gentle headlands with low broken cliffs. Only at one place did they rear up to a conical point.

"Look," said the Colonel, pointing far up the coast-line;

"there's the most interesting part of the Peninsula now. Yes . . ." he stopped, and his jaw came forward as he wondered how the devil to explain why it was interesting.

Tony, looking up at him for the explanation, spent the pause in trying to read the character of his Colonel. Anyone who used "bloody" so often must be pretty inarticulate, and Colonel Tappiter was probably as inarticulate as most; but there was something in the way he stared towards the distant headlands, and something in the troubled expression of his face as he waited for words, that made Tony suspect a powerful charge of romance in the man, which would probably burst out in spluttering sometimes—and was probably going to burst out now.

"Yes," continued the Colonel, "that first headland is Gaba Tepe, and Anzac is just behind it. The next bay is Suvla, where we made our second landing the other day—and made a hell of a mess of it, too. We joined up with the Australians and tried to outflank the Turks who are holding us here. As you perceive, they are still holding us here. Well, dammit, we've got to do something about it—you see. This show's *got* to be won."

He looked at Tony as if expecting his endorsement, so Tony gave it. "Yes, sir."

"Yes . . . this show's the solution of the whole war; you realize that, don't you?"

Here Tony could be enthusiastic. "By jove, yes, sir! I always have."

"Splendid. Well . . . well, there's one thing I always like to say to young officers when they come to me. It's—er—it's this: you see, *you* don't matter. . . . Damn, no! it's the show that matters, isn't it? You may have hell's own life here, before you've done. I hope you will; because, I mean, I hope we shall make a huge drive soon. But even when you're not attacking, you'll have to put up with a lot—heat and flies and lice and bad water, and devil a rest from shell-fire anywhere, but—er—er—I want you to do this: whenever you start to feel sorry for yourself, I want you to say, 'What the devil do *I* matter compared with the—er—the show?' . . . I don't know if you are getting me, but what I mean is, I never knew anyone make a pukka soldier and fight his damndest as long as he thought himself and his views of some importance. D'you see?"

"Yes, sir, I think so."

"I'm saying all this because Scrase, your Acting Company Commander, though a good enough officer and a thoroughly sound fellow—an excellent fellow, in fact—but he's one of those bloody intellectuals who are fond of arguing against the war. Well, all I can say is, he should have thought of all that before he signed on. What I mean is, a soldier's got to leave all that intellectualism at home—or, rather, kind of sacrifice it along with all the rest of him. As I see it, **once** our intellects tell us we've got to offer ourselves to our country, well, by God, that's *that*! and we offer the whole damned outfit of us, lock, stock, and barrel—intellect as well as the rest. When the job's done, if we're still there, we can think about thinking again, and tell everybody that it was a damn sight worse than we expected, but—er—not before."

Tony did not answer.

"Eh, isn't that right?" asked the Colonel sharply.

"Yes, sir," Tony smiled. "I suppose so."

"Of course it is! You start thinking about anything, except how to get on with the job, and you'll start going to pieces as a soldier. You've decided that it's a decent job, or you wouldn't be here. Well, no more thinking about it—except, of course, about—er—about how absolutely thrilling much of it is. Why, look, my boy"—the Colonel's voice had become quite kind, and his eyes lit up with enthusiasm—"see that island towering up into the clouds there? That's Samothrace—and that's Imbros—and this is the Aegean Sea where the Greek ships were parked during the Siege of Troy. Why, Troy itself is only just the other side of the Straits . . . God! Pretty wonderful, isn't it?—to be fighting where Achilles fought and—and all that sort of thing?"

"By jove, yes!" exclaimed Tony.

"Yes . . . well, I must be off to the trenches now. . . . Damn! it's a quarter to bloody ten already."

He went, smartly as a soldier of the stage; and his orderly followed him with slung rifle, far less eagerly. Tony returned to the ravine and found his new servant Private Wylie seated comfortably on the rolled-up valise. Wylie sprang to his feet and offered an explanation.

"I didn't think as I'd start on yer dug-out till you'd chosen the site, yer see. Nah, sir, where would you like yer 'ome, and I'll get a move on abaht it?"

"Well, what do you make a dug-out with?" asked Tony.

"Oh, they give us a shovel, sir, and the Peninsula; and between the two we do something." He bent over the valise and began to unpack it. "Got a ground-sheet, sir?"

"Yes, it's at the bottom. Do we use it for the floor or the roof?"

Wylie came erect again, and scratched his head. "Well, sir, it's not a bad idea to have more than one, sir. Most awficers do."

"But I was told we were only allowed one each."

"Wurl . . . there's that, o' course. Yuss, they do *say* so, sir—but——"

Tony understood and smiled. "Well, where do we get them from? From the Quartermaster?"

"No, sir," said Wylie. He was quite clear on this point; and turning away from it, sent a contemplative gaze towards Imbros. "Nah; not from the Quartermaster hisself, sir. . . . But we get 'em from his Dump."

"Oh, I see." Tony smiled again.

"Yussir. And if I might say so, sir, a few sandbags wouldn't come amiss."

"Will he give us some?"

"No, sir . . . not *give* . . . but I dessay I could put me hands on a few while I'm getting the shovel and the grahnd-sheets."

"All right, then. Had you better go now?"

"No; I'll jest unpack a few things first"—and, running the back of his hand and forefinger beneath his long nose as a brisk preparation, he bent to the valise again. "Pity, sir, the C.O. told us to git started on the dug-out *now*. Not a good time this."

"Why?"

"*Wurl*, it's not a good time for getting together a few things. Their dinner time's better—the Dump wallahs, I mean. And o' course night time's better still. But I expect I shall be able to lift most o' what we want. I got a pal on the Dump . . . *Chrimes!*——" There had been a whine from the Turkish lines and a far away detonation. "Gaw! That's Achi Baba potting at the beaches. This is their Morning Hate, sir. Better sit dahn. Not that we're in much danger here, sir, but things git flying abaht . . . yuss, it's jest about this time they has their Morning Hate."

"Is it bad?"

"Nah!" There was a sorrowful contempt in the word. "Taint what it used to be, sir. It's never nothin' to write 'ome about now. Jest a friendly hate."

The whines from Achi Baba came quick and fast.

"If they go on like that, sir, they'll have the Navy aht." Wylie turned sharply, enthusiastically, towards Tony. "It proper does me good, sir, to see the Navy come and do the friendly by us. Directly we're being strafed, you look at Imbros over there and you'll see a brace o' bloody little destroyers—beg pardon, sir—a couple of destroyers, or a monitor, come out and lie there and give 'em Gawd-help-us. Bit of all right it is. Joo remember, sir, how Sir Iron Hamilton in his dispatch said that the Navy was Father and Mother to the Army in this show?"

"Yes," nodded Tony.

"Yussir. Well, I'm jest about getting what he meant. When the Navy come along it always reminds me of when I was a nipper and the other fellers were a-hittin' of me, and out comes my Ma and 'ollers, 'Ere! You give over! You leave the little feller be!' It was jest like the Navy now, sir."

"But," Tony protested with a frown, "if the Navy can silence their guns, why don't we get a move on towards Constantinople?"

"Well, it's like this here, sir." Wylie had become immensely confidential, and no doubt enjoyed being the man of long experience talking to a new-comer. He extended his closed fist, pulled his sleeve a long way up his forearm, and pointed to fist and forearm. "That there's the Gallipoli Peninsula; i really is jest abaht its shape." He pointed to the ridge of his knuckles. "That there's Achi Baba; and we can no more git up that little hill with the men we've got on Helles than we can bust through it. Sir Iron Hamilton's known that ever since our attacks last June. Right. Nah then, what did we do?" He pointed to a spot behind his wrist. "Here was the Australians 'eld up in Anzac, so we landed six whole divisions at Suvla alongside o' them and tried to take Achi Baba in the rear. But, bless yer, there was another hill in the way there, called Sari Bair. It isn't here on my wrist, but it was bloody well *there* all right!" He cocked a thumb vaguely in the direction of Suvla Bay.

"I saw it just now," said Tony.

"Yussir, it's still there. Gaw!"—and Wylie laughed in a rich appreciation of his joke—"it's still there all right. We didn't manage to collar it in that surprise attack, and we can never do it now."

"But then what's going to happen?"

He winked. "They do say, sir, that there's ten new divisions coming from England, with Kitchener hisself; and it wouldn't surprise me neither——"

At that moment a shell whistled over from the sea. Wylie jumped up with delight. "Gar! That's the Navy, sir! See that little monitor? There it is! Jest under the hills of Imbros. *She'll* talk to 'em all right. Gaw! Doesn't it proper do you good, sir? . . ." They watched the little monitor spurting her flame, and listened to her shells roaring above them, like express trains over a bridge; and then suddenly Wylie touched Tony on the sleeve.

"Johnny Turk's stopped—joo notice, sir? He's 'ad enough. But the Navy'll keep on a bit longer—she likes to give 'im more than enough—so I'll be nipping awf to snaffle them few things now. Shan't be gawn above an hour." He brushed his forefinger along his nose and down both wings of his moustache, and walked off quickly, on his bowed and stocky legs.

Tony stood quite alone in the little ravine, with the sea murmuring up to him from the beach below. Overhead, at intervals, the shells from the monitor roared; and the sun watched, blazing but unperturbed. He resolved to climb higher that he might see the shells bursting on Achi Baba. He went nervously—step by step, with his head ready to duck—for he suspected that he might be doing a dangerous thing. But no one on the land, or on the water, seemed to have any interest in him; and soon he found himself on the bluff's highest point, and standing erect. There in front of him, though seen sideways, lay the whole length of the plateau, very narrow and curving upwards to the flank of Achi Baba. Beyond it rose the hills of Asia, and of Troy. The plateau was carpeted with patches of scrub, and furnished here and there with ruined vineyards or dusty olive groves. A little way up the flank of the hill the trenches of the British wormed and wriggled and twisted; and above them, in a brave and merciless parallel, ran the trenches of the Turks.

Excitement swelled in him, and was none the worse for the

residue of melancholy that lay beneath it. Here he was. He had put thousands of miles between him and his cottage home under the Sussex Downs; and here he was, standing under Achi Baba, at the end of his voyage. He could get no further; those trenches saw to that. What wonderful things he would have to write to Honor. And to Peggy, who would read it all out to his mother. And to old Keatings and Derek in France. Surely France was dull compared with this. No Samothrace to the left of it, and Troy to the right! By heavens, let him get this dug-out finished, and he would sit down on its floor and write to them all.

This land—this tongue of land on which he stood, with the Aegean, a broad mirror, behind him; and in front, though he could not see it, the narrow tide of the Hellespont, under the hill! Over the Hellespont was Abydos, where Xerxes, after he had built his bridges across the Strait, sat on his marble throne and reviewed his triremes on the water and the vast assembly of Persia on the land, before it crossed to Europe, with garlands and with banners, with foot-soldiers and with horsemen, with sacred animals and stream of sumpter beasts, to attempt the overthrow of Athens and the Grecian power. And Xerxes wept (so said old Herodotus, and so had Tony with heating cheeks taught many a time to his boys at Stratton Lye), and he spake thus to Artabanus: "There came upon me a pity as I thought of the shortness of men's lives, and how of all this mighty host none would be alive one day." Then Xerxes crossed over on to the peninsula of Gallipoli with his army numbering a million, and there met him a man of the place who asked, "Wherefore needed Zeus to come in your person, bringing all the world with him, to destroy Greece?" And Xerxes went on to Thermopylae and Salamis.

Tony wandered down again into Leigh Ravine, and waited for Wylie, who returned in due time with a grin on his face, and two bales of sandbags and several ground-sheets under one arm, and two beams of wood under the other, and a pick and two shovels in his hands. "I jest brought a few things that might be useful," he said. He plumped them down, and brushed his wrist along his mottled Roman nose, and smoothed both sides of his moustache.

"The dug-out can be anywhere we like?" asked Tony taking a spade.

"Yussir. The land's all free here."

"It's only leasehold though," laughed Tony.

"What, sir?"

"The landlord may turn us out," Tony amended.

"Yeh, he tries it on now and again," Wylie admitted. "Yeh, he's a nasty customer sometimes, but I've known worse."

Tony had driven his spade into the soft ground. He threw up a spit of earth and another and another; then paused, and lifted his helmet to wipe the sweat from his forehead. Great blue flies buzzed round the moisture and alighted on his eyelids and his lips to drink it; their humming was the only sound in his ears; all murmur of guns had ceased. He returned to his digging, and the sweat dropped from the lining of his helmet into his future home.

CHAPTER V

MANY FRIENDS AND AN ENEMY

TONY had arrived, but he had arrived at what? At a six-mile stretch of stagnation; that was all. Nothing was happening on Gallipoli. Nothing, that is to say, except the sunrays carrying heat-stroke, and the dust and the flies carrying dysentery; and the lice and the lizards and the centipedes and the mantis dwelling in lively cohabitation with both armies; and Achi Baba hurling American shells at the British, and the British eighteen-pounders hurling back shells into the face of Achi Baba; and always a policeman's rattle of rapid-fire along the whole line at sundown. There was no other military movement; only the relief of units in the line, and the endless evacuation of emaciated men whose strength had gone out of their bodies down the cataracts of dysentery. And, day by day, the burial of the dead. It was all the simple effect of a simple cause. The High Authorities at home had quarrelled over the Dardanelles campaign, and one man was huffed with another; so they did nothing about it, but fixed their attention on France; and an army stayed rotting on Gallipoli.

During those months of stagnation one of that army, Antony O'Grogan, made many friends. There was Kit Scrase, temporarily in command of C Company. Tony liked Scrase from the first, and grew to like him more and more; grew even to wonder in his hidden thoughts whether Kit might not be to him what old Raking had never been and what Frank Doyly might have been if their roads had not turned apart. Scrase was a fair-haired Saxon of much the same age as himself, and much the same height, though wider in the shoulders and handsomer in the face; and he loved an abstract argument even more than Tony. Together they would argue for hours about

the rights and wrongs of war, its beauty and its ugliness. Yes, they argued thus, despite the self-denying ordinance recommended by Colonel Tappiter; for none could have resisted Scrase, once he had lit up his pipe and dropped a few intolerably provocative statements, and was manifestly forcing a grin to keep behind his tightening lips (as the well-bred should), and his eyes were a-twinkle—when, in short, he was in brilliant mood for controversy.

Then would Tony propound, with puzzled brow, a favourite theory that war, despite all its hideousness, was strangely beautiful: he could not explain this strange beauty, he said; he could only see it; he could see it like a lambent light playing over all the tracts of desolation. And by that he didn't mean just the self-sacrifice and the bravery and the good-fellowship, which were obvious things; but he meant a beauty in the sheer Fact of War. Oh, he hardly knew what he meant, but sometimes it seemed to him that war didn't appeal so much to the ape and tiger in men as, dammit all, to the poet in them. At any rate, it fascinated *him*; and he couldn't see that it fascinated the lower elements of him so much as the higher. Why, wasn't this infinitely alluring beauty of war written into the very texture of all languages? All writers, no matter what they were describing, would they not rather employ the military metaphor than any other? Who would write "Voltaire was the intellectual superior of Rousseau" if he could write "Voltaire mounted the heavier intellectual guns"? Who would leave the sentence "The old religions were gradually displaced by Christianity" had he thought of "One by one the old gods went down before the advancing artillery of Christ"? When Tolstoy planned a novel that should surpass all others, to what did he look for a subject? The Napoleonic Wars. When Hardy left the domesticities of his Wessex novels and sought to write a great epic, what alone seemed a theme worthy of "The Dynasts"? The same. Here was the dilemma, old man: rationally he loathed the idea of war, but emotionally and æsthetically he gloried in it: now explain that, old man; explain it, please; he wanted to see where he was wrong, if he could.

And Scrase delighted in explaining it—or rather, in controverting it. No, Tono; no, Bungay—Scrase called his friend alternately Tono and Bungay, without reference or apology to Mr. Wells—no, it wouldn't wash; it was damned

bad æsthetics, that: beauty was essentially order, war was disorder, *ergo* war was an offence.

But dash it all, Kit, old man—Tony would become quite lyrical—what about a thunderstorm seen from a height in the Alps, or the collapse of a whole mountain-side of snow under the sun; were these things order? No. And yet who could deny they were beautiful? So when half the nations stood arrayed against half the nations, and all their guns spoke!

Oh, great arguments, on the slopes of Leigh Ravine. And as they argued the sun would go down behind Imbros, and all the world turned purple; and the Turks, fearing the fall of night, would open their famous rapid-fire, which ran along the whole width of the trenches with the sound of a forest in flames, and Tony would jump up and say, “Hell, old man, isn’t *that* beautiful? *Course* it is, you blitherer! You’ve got to leave the human aspect out. Beauty’s inhuman sometimes.”

Scrase argued brilliantly on the opposite side; but Tony always had a sense that Scrase’s arguments were intellectual exercises unrelated to his personal feelings; and that therefore his own, bewildered and muddled though they were, were the truer talk. This was not to say that Scrase was hypocritical: it simply meant that in his love of these jolly dialectics he became impersonal. He was fundamentally a straight fellow, with a high sense of duty. He had arrived on the Peninsula with his regiment a few weeks after the great landing of April, and had played a brave part—so the reports said—in all the battles since. None the less, in his year of soldiering he had learnt to hate the war, and to doubt the perfect innocence of any of its belligerents, and to see with clear eyes the dullness of our plain honest generals, and the sharpness of our most specious politicians; and he had the courage to keep his eyes on these disturbing visions and not to let them swing away as the softer eyes of Tony swung; but, despite these doubts, he saw also that he had accepted the responsibilities of an officer and must discharge them to the best of his power.

Scrase was as reticent about his emotions as he was demonstrative about his thoughts. Not in all the time they were together did he tell by an overt word his affection for Tony; he would have been quite incapable of doing so. But the affection was there: and it peeped out in the confidences which, as the friendship deepened, he would give to Tony. To him and to none else he would talk of his father, Alderman Scrase

of Thamesmouth, a dear, good, simple Tory whose fire-eating pronouncements, these days, so chafed his only son; and of his mother who, being one of the gentlest souls alive, was the echo of her husband, and therefore would never, never understand the thoughts that stirred in Kit.

"I don't argue at home," he said; "it's no good hurting them, so perhaps that's why I work it off here."

And Tony, in return, would speak to him, as to none else, about the secrets of his family: about his father who had deserted them, and—aye, he went so far as this—about Honor and the failure of his love for her, and its resurgence now that he had her no more.

"You know, when all's said and done, old man, there's only one woman in your life who really matters," said he, quoting Hughes Anson without acknowledgment.

Scrase nodded over this, and said nothing, with great respect.

That was Kit Scrase. In his clear fearless vision he reminded Tony of Hughes Anson—who, thank Heaven, was again a near neighbour in the trenches held by A Company—but he was different from The Roseate Hughes in this, that while he doubted the virtue of killing Turks, he did it from a sense of duty, whereas Rosy had no doubt about the viciousness of killing Turks but did it from a sense of sin—or so at least he said.

Then there were Hedges and Vaughan, the other subalterns of C Company; pleasant fellows whom Tony liked well, but they had not the vividness of Scrase; and as Hedges died quickly and Vaughan, drained of all but the dregs of life by his dysentery, staggered off the Peninsula one day, a skeleton in an envelope of yellow skin, they fill no place in Tony's story. Only Kit Scrase remained for a very long while: remained till his terrible end.

Then there was Joe Wylie.

"You've inherited a jewel of a batman in Joe Wylie," said Scrase. "Joe's a slovenly bird, of course. When he first came to the Company we decided that he was too dirty for a smart platoon, so we made him a cook."

"Naturally," Tony agreed.

"Quite. Absolutely. And it suited him all right; he's a bit of an 'old soldier,' who doesn't believe in hard work or danger if he can dodge it—but he has one virtue that's worth most of the others put together."

"What's that, old man?"

"Well—his immense goodwill towards everybody. I don't suppose he's conscious of it, but that's what makes old Joe what he is. He can't pass anybody without cracking a joke at him, and when the men are done-to-the-wide on the march, and are talking murder and mutiny, he brings 'em back to their natural humour by spinning some abominable yarn—probably an obscene one. They say that he used to play a cornet at public-house doors before the war, and tell lewd stories for a living; and now he devotes these notable arts to the service of his country. It's good service, too. You'll see what I mean before you're much older."

Tony saw something of it fairly soon. When he chose the lesser of the two diseases rife on Gallipoli, and went down with "acute catarrhal jaundice" and lay supine in his dug-out, yellow-eyed and atrabiliar, and when the food that Wylie brought him sent his face to the wall, and the taste of the chlorinated water overturned his stomach, then did Joe Wylie try to cheer him by spreading a grin under his moustache, and giving one brush to his long nostrils with the back of his palm, and beginning: "Well now, sir, did I ever tell you this one, sir?" and there followed a rehearsal of some comic incident of his soldiering, Wylie guffawing loudly at the conclusion of the story, and Tony sadly smiling.

Once Wylie told him of how he came to enlist on the 6th of August, 1914. "It was like this here, sir. I was aht playing me cornet, and in them days, between you and me, sir, you could make a tidy penny aht of a cornet, what with 'Land of 'Ope and Glory' and 'Arts of Oak' and the people that patriotic—well, sir, I was knocked right awf me tune by a band passing, and law-luvver! it were our Royal West Essex being marched to the Drill Hall; and I walked along too, you bet; and I see young Mr. Scrase, Alderman Scrase's son, and Mr. Upperton, our auctioneer; and there in the ranks I see Bill 'Oxton, and Fred Roberts with young Dicky his brother, and Dave Piper (what was killed the other day), and gaw! if I'd bin a year or two younger I'd 'ave gawn and listed there and then. It was difficult to see all the boys going awf, and not to want to be along of 'em. So I went to a pub to get a half of bitter, and there was Tib—that's my missus—having a half of staht too, to celebrate the beginning of the war. I told her as I'd only jest stopped meself going for a soldier, and Tib says, 'Now

down talk so silly, Jow. You're forty-five and you know it.' So I says, 'Am I, my gal? I'm not so sure. I ain't bin sure of it all day. I feel about sixteen to-dye. Blimey!' I said, 'there was old Eddie Bancock sweatin' along in his file with his chest slipping down into his flies: *be's* forty-three, I'll lay me 'at on it; and I'd like to be along of old Eddie.' But the Missus only says, 'Nah, Jow, down be silly! you're spoiling me day.' Well, there was a lahsy swine of a pacifist in the pub, called Steve Ablett, and we got arguing, and I says to him, 'Look here, cocky, I dare say what you says is all right, and this here Asquith's probably no better than he should be, and Sedward Grey's nothing to us, and I don't see as the blooming British Empire's ever done us fellers any good, but if a lousy Kayser tries to 'it it 'ard, then I'm for 'eavin' a brick at him along o' the others. Can't 'elp it,' I said. 'It's me nature.' 'E said it was a school kid's nature; and that fair got me rag out. He was one of those long weedy celery-stick sort of fellers, sir; rather like a clothes line 'angin' dahnwards with a pair of boots swingin' on the end—as I told 'im. A pacifist—pooh! Did-jever see a pacifist that was more than twenty-five rahnd the chest, sir?' "

"Oh, yes, Joe. Sometimes," Tony protested.

"Well, *I* never, sir. These pacifists are only pacifists because they don't want the recruiting sergeants to see their chests. And I told 'im so; I told 'im straight; I said, 'Gahn! with a pigeon-breast like yours you daren't have a war!' "

"Did you, Joe?" laughed Tony. "That was 'coming it strong'!"

"Yes, I did; and he says, 'Fat lot you'll do in the war beyond talk!' And I says, 'Oh, and is that so?' "—Wylie acted this dialogue with magnificent gusto; he made a comedy duo of it, in which you could see the weedy Steve and the stocky Joe firing back-chat at each other—" 'We'll see about that,' I says. And he says, 'You're going to enlist, I suppose?' And I says, 'No more wouldn't that surprise me neither! So there!' And he says, 'Gow on! you'll talk big, but you wouldn't join up,' and I says, 'Course I would, you perishin' traitor! If old Eddie Bancock would, wouldn't I?' And Tib, who was standing at me side, says, 'Course he would if he wanted to. Nah then!' "

"Good old Tib!" interrupted Tony.

"Yussir; and well, then, Steve wanted to make out that I could safely brag because they wouldn't have me at forty-five——"

"Did he, Joe? That was 'coming it dirty,' wasn't it?"

"Yussir, and I bet 'im they *would* 'ave me, so nah then! So he says, 'Prove it! You aren't doing much to back your words up,' and I says, 'Aren't I?' and he says, 'No.' And I says, 'Then I am, then!' and he says, 'Well, let's see yer do it.' And I says, 'Do it, yersay?' And he says, 'Yes.' And I says, 'Do it, eh?' and he says, '*Yes*, that's what I said.' And I says, 'You dare me to?' and he says, 'I dare you to!' and I says, 'Right, then, you perishin' pro-German; and lemme tell you what'll 'appen to you. You'll be tyken and shot against a wall.' And Tib says, '*Which* I hope he is—devah'tly—see?—Yuss!' and would you believe it, sir, I gawn and done it strytle away, I did; and Gawd 'elp us, this is where it's brought me! I never thought of this. Law-lummy, it's comic, it is!'"

And at such an absurd conclusion Joe Wylie laughed incontinently, his long finger covering his moustache.

Tony had not been long with the 15th before he believed he had an enemy. Lieutenant Moulden was a sallow man of thirty, with dark, sunken eyes, and a skin too lined for his age. His were the lines of thought, no doubt, but of small, self-seeking thought; they had been graved by petty suspicions and worries and resentments. His voice was pleasant—too pleasant; it had the ingratiating accents of a salesman behind a counter; and, in truth, it was from behind a counter that Moulden had come, and the unhappy memory, to his narrow nature, was a running fount of worry. He was at once the oldest and most junior of the subalterns—another fact to hurt him not a little, though he made very merry about it. His manner was the universal manner of levity, but one felt that it sat ill on his shoulders; that he had donned it, after careful study, as a social dress; that with Moulden, at any rate, it was unreal, and God was not in it. Let him wear it as he might, an acute eye could see that the real Moulden, withered by his own sensitiveness, was an unhappy creature, lonely and drifting and insecure.

Tony thought him the worst type of "temporary gentleman." There was no shame in having stepped from a hosier's shop into the rank of an officer, but here was one of those fellows who, directly they found themselves hobnobbing as equals with the men whom hitherto they had met only across their deferential counters, must labour to confirm their equality by palpable untruths about their homes, their incomes, and their titled friends. Acutely aware of his difference from young men like Scrase and Hughes Anson, Moulden strove to bury it under these stupid shams and under tones of a great self-confidence.

Why an especial enmity should have arisen between this man and himself Tony was never very clear. Perhaps Moulden disliked him for coming from another division with a month's seniority upon his shoulder-straps; or because his natural manner with the men was more effective than his own uneasy commands; or because Colonel Tappiter had pronounced Tony "an acquisition," whereas he was barely polite to Moulden, having early weighed his worth. Tony knew well enough that Moulden lost no opportunity of delicately hinting, under protestations of a considerable liking for "young O'Grogan," that the lad *was* rather inclined to curry favour with the men, and to bumsuck for the Colonel—for, since the Colonel would have little to do with Moulden, he could make a virtue of having little to do with the Colonel.

But, whatever the causes, there had grown up between them one of those dark antipathies that render two men self-conscious in each other's presence and inhibit their talk. Each knew that the other was listening to his every word, and criticizing it and hating it. If Tony found Moulden in dug-out or mess, he sought to escape stealthily, guiltily; the presence of the man destroyed all his naturalness. If Moulden suddenly encountered Tony, it did not destroy his naturalness, because he had none to destroy, but it rasped him as by an invisible friction. Tony became nervously irritated by the least of Moulden's habitual phrases—by his "I meanter say," and "Yer' see," and "Well, put it like this," and his perpetual "Thet's right!" instead of "yes," and his "really" dropped into every sentence. Surely "really" could be the insincerest word in the language! "Thet's right, O'Grogan. I agree with you—really. I meanter say: I suppose one can put it like that—really." Oh hell!

He would not have minded these phrases had they not been in such irritating discord with Moulden's pretensions to gentility. Colonel Tappiter could stutter his "I mean" and "I mean to say"—and did, in point of fact, stutter them fifty times in every conversation; but with the Colonel they didn't sound offensive; with Moulden—well, with a vocabulary and an accent like his, fancy pretending to high connexions! And why pretend at all? Here was death waiting for Moulden round every corner, and the fellow could still worry about men's opinion of his social position! What could it matter what men thought of you beneath the shadow of death?

Tony was soon to learn that, to him also, it could matter very much indeed.

Meanwhile his discomfort at Moulden's presence would sicken at times into an irrational fear of him and of his dislike; but he could put no name to his fear.

Tony counted some good friends from among the men of the Company, and the chief of them perhaps were Fred Roberts, Ernest Botten, Willie Sparrow and Jim Stott. He found all these the first morning he entered the fire-trenches; all except Jim Stott. And as he approached the fire-trenches along a communication trench he saw "Percy" for the first time.

"Percy" was a brown mummified hand issuing from the tossed-up parapet and pointing a finger towards the Line. Under the Gallipoli sun the dust had powdered away from the shallow counterpane of earth resting upon a body up there, and exposed this hand; but no man now, would cover the hand again, or touch or disturb it in any way, for the superstition had seized the trenches that, as long as that finger pointed forwards, the British army would not go back-wards.

Tony stared at it. It was strange to think that this dead soldier—who had been a petty labourer from a shipyard on the Clyde—should have stayed so long on the site of his falling, covered only with a blanket of earth, and putting his useless right hand to a purpose still.

Tony entered the firing line and walked along it. Difficult to believe that this constricted and smelling ditch was the ultimate end of that vast service of supply which stretched

from the docks of Devonport and Southampton to the forty quays of Alexandria ; from Alexandria to the crowded harbour of Lemnos ; and from Lemnos to the busy beaches of Helles ! Was this dirty ditch the climax and justification of all the work that palpitated in England ; of the great hospitals of Malta ; of all those black transports and grey warships that were plying in the Mediterranean and Aegean Seas ; was this tumbled parapet the last word to so proud a sentence ?

For Tony it was a moment of realization. Yes, it all wasted away into this drain, just here.

He turned from the realization and walked on. A glance through the periscope of the first man encountered showed him the black sandbags of the Turks' front line. Needless to say, not a Turk was visible ; only the reports of their rifles and the explosion of one of their bombs behind our parados assuring him that their trenches were not empty. He went farther, and it seemed to him that every second man was sitting on the fire-step, bare-chested, and hunting in his shirt for lice. In one bay he came upon Fred Roberts, the man with the so typical London face whom he had met yesterday in the Gully carrying sandbags of rations ; Fred was having a wrestle with the lock of his rifle, and cursing about as virulently as when he upset his bully-beef tins.

"More trouble, Roberts?" inquired Tony ; and Fred Roberts recognized him and stayed his grumbling.

With Fred was his brother Dicky. This Dicky was at least fifteen years younger than Fred, being perhaps twenty-two to the other's thirty-seven ; and he had all the high spirits of his youth. Picking at the seams of his shirt, he was singing, "I'm lousy but I'm 'appy . . ." whereat he stopped and grinned at the approaching officer. Fred, being on the whole a man who had quieted under the weight of his forty years, seemed to think he must apologize for the ribaldry of his brother, and explained :

"It's them there Gallipoli cattle, sir."

"Yes," said Tony, and added with the fatuity of one just out from England, "they're a bit unpleasant, I suppose." He was feeling, to say the truth, uncomfortably shy of these his men.

"*Wur!*, we down mind 'em so much, sir," answered Fred, grinning. "They give us summat to think about."

"How's the hand?" asked Tony, glancing at the bandage round the knuckles of Fred's right hand.

"Ow, it's nothin', sir. It's nothin' to write home about. I can't get to Blighty on that—can't even get to 'awspital. Wish to Gawd I could!"

"Well . . ." the conversation had languished. "I'm glad to find you're in my company. I—I hope we shall see a lot of each other."

"Yessir," said Fred Roberts.

"Well—er—well, good-bye for the present."

"Goo'-bye, sir."

Continuing his passage, Tony came to a three-foot square hole, the entrance of a subterranean sap that led below the enemy's position. He was not going to miss anything, so, all huddled up, and with the aid of a rope, he let himself down the steep decline into the pitch darkness of this attenuated tunnel. Crawling on hands and knees, or slithering along while he sat on his heels, he pursued the course of the gallery, feeling his way by striking both sides with his stick. After he had turned two corners the darkness became absolute—the pure undiluted commodity made on Creation's Day. He pushed on till he surmised that he must be well beneath Turkish territory. His imagination created with horror the sensations of those who were sometimes entombed in these galleries by the explosion of a Turkish counter-mine. On he went, knowing that there were men of his command somewhere in this bowel of earth; and ever and again his crouching back dusted the roof of the gallery. Where were the men? He hoped he would find them, for he was beginning to doubt his ability to trace his way back; there might be cross-roads in the gallery. It stopped his heart to picture himself going round and round, unable to find the way out. As for the men, he feared lest they had been buried alive and it had fallen to him to discover the disaster. Then suddenly he heard a welcome sound. It was a pleasant English voice a little distance away, saying: "I say, Ernie! what's that bloody noise?"

Tony hailed them and explained with blushes (not to be seen, though hotly felt) that he was a new officer—and extraordinarily foolish his explanation sounded, down there in the blackness.

A good fellow, much relieved to find that the intruder was no Turk, crawled to him with an unlit candle-end and begged for a match. Unfortunately Tony had none to give him, so the man said, "Oh, well, it didn't matter," and led him to where two of them were spending their two-hour shift in a

listening-post, which was a little off-shoot from the gallery. This second fellow—or voice, for that was all he was—proved to be a native of Twineham in Sussex, only a stone's-throw from Tony's cottage home in Albourne; and straightway Tony and he forgot their relationship as officer and private and became in the darkness just a gentleman of Sussex and one of its labouring men, who must speak of the South Downs at sunset, and the ring of trees on Chanctonbury Hill, and the noble crown of Wolstonbury brooding over the weald.

Truer, maybe, to say that the officer did the talking, glad to have found a subject so pleasant and fruitful; and that the man's part consisted of, "Aye, zur; reckon I know it well enough," and "Aye, zur, I should know it middlin' well, living along of it twenty year and mower," for Ernie Botten—in all solemnity he had announced that his name was thus—Ernie Botten had the slow-working Sussex brain. "Sheep's Eye Cottage? Aye, zur, reckon I know Sheep's Eye well enough, zur. It belonged to Mr. Orde of Thatchers Spinney Farm, zur, till they made a gen'l'man's cottage of it, zur."

In that "zur" with which Ernie Botten punctuated every clause of his sentences, Tony heard the essential difference between him and the pert East-enders of Stratford, Barking and Thamesmouth, who made up the majority of the R.W.E.s. The feudal deference of a labourer in the fields of a Home County was still the habit of Ernie Botten. Neither he nor any of his forefathers had ever known, nor would they have understood, the saucy independence that a pavement breeds.

"I must have been living in it when you were in Twineham if you didn't leave till 1914," said Tony.

Ernie Botten thought this out, and discovered in due time that it was indisputable. "Aye, zur; reckon you must. Aye, we musta bin nigh each other if you was there in 1914."

"We may have met before, then," suggested Tony.

This was far from clear to Ernie Botten, who, after considering the proposition at length, submitted, "Well, zur, I can't say about that, zur. I don't rightly know what you're like—not in this darkness."

"Nor I you," laughed Tony. "You must reintroduce yourself to me, up in the light."

"Aye, zur. Ernie Botten's me name."

Assuredly it was not in Ernie to perceive the queerness of this colloquy, but Tony's mind awoke to it for a moment:

here they were, talking of beloved scenes, as they sat on the floor of a little appendix in a bowel of earth, thousands of miles away from the landscapes that were filling their minds; each unable to see the other's likeness or guess his age: and the foe above them. He remembered a day—England's last day of peace—when Honor and Peggy and Jill and himself stood on the crown of Wolstonbury and gazed at the vast carpet of the weald below them and thought of the men and women in those tiny villages who were standing at their cottage doors waiting for news . . . and waiting . . . and waiting. And here was he, speaking to one of these men, in such a place! Well, all luck to the fellow! It was good of him to be here.

There was no doubt that a considerable friendship had established itself between Ernie Botten who came from Twineham and this new officer who came from Albourne; and Ernie, if he couldn't express it in words, could at least do so by escorting his friend to a new and better exit from the sap; which he did, taking him to the bottom of a perpendicular shaft up which one hauled oneself along a rope.

As Tony issued from the maw of this well-like shaft, he saw above him a long strip of dazzling sunlight: it was a ribbon of the open sky, shining above the narrow fire-trench.

He passed into the next bay and made another friend. This was a very thin and frail youngster who could not have been more than sixteen years old; and the sickness in his face and body startled Tony. He had the hollow cheeks, the glassy eyes, and the sunken wrists of a consumptive, though the disease which consumed him was probably named, not Tuberculosis, but Gallipoli. The flies played about a sore on his lip. William Sparrow was his name, and, as Tony learned later, he was known throughout the battalion as "Little Willie."

The presence of so youthful a victim on the Peninsula in the second year of war is quickly explained. The culpability was his own; for when England took to war in 1914, numbers of her immature male children deemed themselves in a state of hostility with Germany and her Allies, and by a little perjury in the Recruiting Offices slipped themselves into the campaigns; and in 1915 the Authorities were only just beginning to weed them out and send them home to their mothers. Tony had met them in Malta and Mudros, waifs under orders for England. The searching fingers of the War Office had not yet reached

this far-away desolate ditch, north of Leigh Ravine in Gallipoli; so Tony was able to sit beside Willie Sparrow, aged sixteen, on the fire-step.

The conversation was not five minutes old before the boy produced from his breast-pocket the photographs of his mother and—bless his heart—his girl. The first picture showed the most lovable of old working women, dressed up in her Sunday silks, and beaming as she sat in the ornate studio chair, with a splendid boy in khaki standing at her side. This boy in the photograph was a round-cheeked, sparkling person, full of pride in his new uniform—a plump, well-fed, prize boy. And the mother knew all about it, and had put on her silks to do him no discredit. They were a prize pair, the two of them. Tony complimented the sickly youngster at his side on his mother, and asked him who was the boy in the photograph.

“That’s me,” said Willie Sparrow.

“Of course it is,” answered Tony quickly. “What a fool I am!” But not in outline nor in feature did the haggard youth on the fire-step resemble the blooming boy in the photograph.

“I’ve got a bit thinner,” he volunteered apologetically, as if it was something to be ashamed of. “And I reckon mother’s got a bit thinner too, the way she worries over me. I wonder—I wonder, sir, if you’d mind writing and telling her I’m in the pink. Coming from a new officer, it might do the trick.”

Tony promised to write that afternoon, and turned the talk into other channels. He quickly discovered that Willie Sparrow was a lad of far greater education and refinement than most of the labourers, general dealers and railway workers who were his comrades in the Royal West Essex. Like Fred Roberts and his young brother Dicky, he came from Southend, but its evening schools had smoothed his manners and enlarged his meanings, while the quiet of a simple God-fearing home had touched him with its own culture. Willie Sparrow could talk of serious things, and cared to talk of them; and Tony perceived that it was no small relief to this sick and languishing child, whose thoughts had long been stored away from the hearing of his crude companions, to have found such a sympathetic listener as himself; and he stayed talking with him for a long time. As he rose to go, the top of his helmet must have shown above the parapet, for *smack* went a Turkish rifle

and the bullet zipped into the parados. To his surprise the boy, who, sitting on the step, was in perfect safety, ducked and cowered.

"He can see you, sir," he said.

"Yes, but he can't see *you*. There's no need for you to duck."

"Sorry, sir," he replied. "I can't help it. I've seen several killed by showing their heads above the parapet, and it shakes me up. It's an awful thing to have man after man killed beside you. My best chum was shot just like that, and he fell on top of me, knocking me down. It—it rather broke my nerve."

It was the simple truth. His face was white like the face of one who had suddenly snapped a limb; his eyes were those of a frightened stag.

The bay was empty except for these two, so Tony said gently:

"The fact of the matter is, son, that you're not at all well."

And at that Willie Sparrow broke down. Sudden sympathy in an emotional moment had rushed the tears up to his eyes. He became a child of ten years old, and sobbed, "I don't want to be a coward, sir . . . I don't want to be a coward. . . ." Tony talked with him a little longer, till he should be at *ease* again; then went his way. And as he turned round the traverse Willie Sparrow called after him: "You won't forget that letter, sir, will you? Tell her I'm in the pink."

One night, after a day whose heat stuck the clothes to one's body with sweat, it turned astonishingly cold. The officers in Leigh Ravine, unable to keep warm in their little mess, went to their dug-outs and hurried, half-clothed, into their "flea-bags" and laced up their valises over them. Scrase, anxious to continue a most enjoyable and brightly effulgent argument with Tony, brought his valise to the new dug-out, and the two talked beneath their crowding blankets. Leigh Ravine was quiet under the stars; and the Aegean Sea, far below, lay still as a mountain lake.

A little way down the bluff the officers' batmen, in a glimmering dug-out, were singing hymns. They were the same men who earlier in the evening had been yelling about the bonnie banks of Loch Lomond—and who, between verses, had

been prodigal with their oaths. They had chanted their Hymn of Boredom :

“ When this weary war is over,
Oh how happy I shall be ;
When I get my city clothes on,
No more soldiering for me ; ”

they had greeted, loudly laughing, the close of the Turkish rapid-fire with “ When you come to the end of a perfect day ; ” and now with much feeling—indeed, with exaggerated expression—they sang very softly the hymns of home.

Scrase and Tony forgot their argument and listened. Four of the batmen were singing in unison, but one voice was improvising harmonies. This was the fresh young voice of “ Little Willie ” Sparrow, who had been a choir-boy all his life. He was here, because Scrase had transferred him, at Tony’s request, from the trenches to the easier life of an Officer’s Servant. A second voice, too, would sometimes separate itself from the others, and wander about in a distinguished loneliness—Joe Wylie’s : now it was humorously loud, now humorously soft, and anon it trembled up the ravine in an appalling vibrato. Then for a period it would stop, while he accompanied the hymn on a mouth-organ.

“ Lead, Kindly Light, amid the encircling gloom,
Lead Thou me on. . . . ”

Striving after effect, the men sang it very slowly indeed ; and the two officers, wrapped in their blankets, smoked and listened. Once Tony took his pipe from his mouth, and, knocking it out on his revolver, said something to his companion.

“ Shut up, Bungay,” Scrase replied tersely. “ I want to listen.”

Now the men were singing, “ God be with you till we meet again,” and singing it with a studied sadness, as if they were determined to make themselves thoroughly homesick ; and after an interval during which, in the quiet of the night, you could hear the leaves of a hymn-book turning, they burst into :

“ Glory to Thee, my God, this night,
For all the blessings of the light. . . . ”

Tony longed for it to go on, and wished it would stop. Old Sunday evenings in his father’s church ; old holidays at Freshwater Bay when he and Peggy would listen to Captain Alum

singing his hymns on Tennyson Down—these memories were with him now. In his dug-out in Leigh Ravine he was so high up and so far removed from the people and the places associated with these melodies; and they made him feel even higher and farther.

“Teach me to live, that I may dread
The grave as little as my bed. . . .”

He rose and found his way down to the dug-out which held the little choir. He saw five men lolling on the earth around a candle stuck upon a salmon tin. Joe Wylie, heavily blanketed, was blowing spittle out of his mouth-organ; Art Webster, Moulden's batman, was holding the khaki hymn-book in a mittened hand; Willie Sparrow lay on his stomach that he might read over Webster's shoulder; and two others, reclining on their backs, awaited the instructions of the choir-master. When Tony complimented them on their singing they apologized for its poorness on the grounds that there was only one hymn-book between them; and Wylie said, “Joo like it, sir? Gawd! I thought it was keeping 'em awake—the gen'l'men lodgers upstairs.”

“Not at all,” said Tony rather foolishly, “not at all.”

“Why, I told Art Webster his voice'd get him fourteen days' C.B. Now, Willie Sparrer, 'e knows all abaht it. Art *thinks* he does, but there's his voice, you see—it must be 'ard on you awficers, sir.”

“Oh no. We're enjoying it.”

“Oh well then, sir; if you like it, we'll gie you some more. Come on, Art.”

Tony walked back to his lofty nest, and was quickly in his blankets; while the men, much encouraged and glad to please, appeared to have undertaken the task of singing every hymn in the book. Tony and Scrase could hear them quarrelling as to which they should sing next, or the voice of Art Webster crying, “Here's one we ain't 'ad yet!”

They must have sung fifty hymns before their candle went out.

Scrase spoke no more to Tony, nor Tony to Scrase, but their eyes were still open. And suddenly a searchlight from the sea played over their hill-slope, lighting for a second the inside of their dug-out.

“Hullo!” exclaimed Tony. “Did you see that?”

"Yes," said Scrase. "The Navy."

Tony was stirred. "The jolly old Navy keeping watch!"

"Yes, Father and Mother to the Army," mused Scrase.

Tony sat up and peered out to sea; but in the darkness he could find no watching ship: he saw only the smooth Aegean and, across it, the shapes of the Imbros hills, a thought darker than the starry sky. He sat there for some time; and suddenly the searchlight played over the bluffs of Leigh Ravine again. It lit the silent dug-out where the men who had been singing were now asleep; and it lit Tony's face.

"Scrase!" he muttered. "Scrase, are you asleep?"

There was no answer.

He composed himself to rest; but before he slept, he knew that the searchlight had swept over the tired army a third time.

CHAPTER VI

PADRE QUICKSHAW

AND still nothing happened on the Peninsula ; so that even Colonel Tappiter, who had persisted in his gallant confidence that the halt was only temporary and the Authorities must be going to drive on with so brilliant a conception as Gallipoli, began to sadden with thought. Usually he kept his thoughts to himself, but now and again they fermented in him, and he fumed. He would pause in his tour of the trenches and, being a big man, would stand a-tiptoe to lift his spectacled eyes above the parapet and have a look at Achi Baba rising so gently behind the Turkish lines.

"We could do it, Scrase, we could do it!" he would mutter. "An ounce of resolution at home, and we could do it. . . . This damned shilly-shallying. . . . Let 'em make up their minds (if they've got any to make up) and send us pukka support, and, by God, we'd do it for 'em! But no; not they! Talk and gas. . . . Talk and gas. . . . Because we've been biffed at Helles and biffed at Suvla, is that any reason for not going on? If it is, then it's some new way of fighting that I don't understand. Why the devil isn't that fellow wearing his helmet? This battalion's a bloody disgrace—more like a collection of toughs and footpads than a regiment of soldiers."

And when news filtered down the ravines, one October morning, that Sir Ian Hamilton had been recalled to London and a new Commander was on his way; and when, all along its route, this story lifted eyebrows and drew grimaces, and officers whispered the word "evacuation," then did Colonel Tappiter heat with dissent. He would have no truck with such a word; at a breath of it he scattered his "bloodies" like rose petals about the Peninsula. "Oh no! Bloody well no! . . . No, dammit, I daren't think that. We can't be going to throw up this

show. . . . No, I believe it means that we're going to make another terrific attempt. Yes, that's what it means."

He was like a schoolboy, justified and triumphant, when he read in a Special Order of the Day the last words of their high-hearted commander: "Sir Ian Hamilton thanks all ranks for the wonderful way they have seconded his efforts to lead them towards that decisive victory which, under their new chief, he has the most implicit confidence they will achieve." "There you are!" cried Colonel Tappiter, tearing off his spectacles, as the mess accorded to these words the tribute of silence. "I told you so! No talk of evacuation there! No, it means a great forward movement at last!"

But did he believe it in his heart of hearts? It was immediately after this that Stephenson of B Company was killed in a traverse just in front of the Colonel and Scrase; a bomb splinter had found his head, and they hurried forward and saw his brains on the trench floor. The Colonel, turning towards Scrase, saw that he was shaken, for Stephenson had been a great friend of his. "Damn, man, there's nothing to be shaken about," he snapped angrily. "What did you expect? . . Little thing like that! . . . Don't stand there staring, you fools. Get the stretcher-bearers. Come on, Scrase: we shall probably be done in ourselves sooner or later, and what do our potty little lives matter——" but he didn't continue: there was no doubt that he was reciting with less conviction than usual his favourite maxim by which he sought to keep himself a good soldier and his men good soldiers too.

However, there came a day when the little news-sheet, *The Peninsula Press*, printed a passionate utterance delivered by Mr. Churchill in the Parliament at home; and Colonel Tappiter read it once; then waved it above his head and read it aloud. "Listen to this, you fellows: 'If there were any operations in the history of the world which, having been begun, it was worth while to carry through with the utmost vigour and fury, with a consistent flow of reinforcements, and an utter disregard of life, it was the operations so daringly and brilliantly begun in the immortal landing of April 25th.'

There!" Excited with approval, Colonel Tappiter tore off his spectacles and drummed his knuckles on the paper joyfully. "That's it! That's it absolutely! That's what I've always bloody well said, only this fellow expresses it better. By jove, they know how to talk, these fellows!"

And he got up and carried his large, heavy, but erect frame to the window, where he looked out thoughtfully at the stillness over the scrub and the sea.

During the stagnation there was one very active person on this western edge of the Peninsula : Padre Quickshaw. Hardly ever did Tony walk over the plateau, or down the Gully Ravine, but he met sooner or later that queer little figure with the permanent indignation sparking in his eyes and the pungent exasperation spurting from his lips. One morning Tony was sent down the Gully with an oral message to a battery commander in Geogheghan's Bluff. Now, if one continued to think of the Gully Ravine as a Titan's trench, then Geogheghan's Bluff was a shell-blown landslide in one of its walls, which, having fallen, made a sheltered amphitheatre where hundreds of dug-outs might be cut. In the floor of this amphitheatre was a tiny wired cemetery, and here Tony saw a parade of gunners round an open grave, and an unmistakable figure at the grave's head—Padre Quickshaw, with a short crumpled surplice hanging awry on his shoulders, a purple stole over the surplice, a khaki collar appearing incongruously above, and a pith helmet crowning all. High up on a shelf in the Gully wall a battery was firing steadily at Achi Baba, and its shells flew with a roar over the little funeral service, unconsciously providing the salute. Very fitting that an artilleryman should have the guns for his firing party! And their salute was not "three rounds blank," but three hundred live shells directed at the enemy, as if in vengeance. Tony went up and stood by the congregation. So loudly and persistently did the guns bark that Padre Quickshaw, without hope of being heard, had resigned himself to mumbling beneath this baldachin of noise: "Forasmuch as it hath pleased Almighty God——": it was almost as though the guns were fretfully asserting that their dark business of retribution was more urgent than this womanish business of mourning and prayer. The Burial Office completed, the parade was marched away, and Quickshaw, at Tony's request, conducted him to his destination, for this padre probably knew his way about the Peninsula better than most men. And all the time the battery in the cliff continued to fire over the new grave: other

men might finish so quickly, but they had not done with the story yet.

Another morning—this was when the rains had come—Tony clambered out of the Western Mule Trench on to the plateau, resolved to continue his journey in the open, let the distant Turks see him or not. He had sickened of dragging his boots out of the glutinous yellow mud that filled the bottom of the trench. Arrived on the plateau, he discovered that he was standing upon the very “Deserted Battlefield” of his dreams. It was a wild flat table-top stretching to the brink of a perpendicular cliff whose foot was lapped by the sea. Among the patches of scrub that covered it; among the rusty shell-cases, the shrapnel bullets, and the discarded small-arm ammunition; among the ruined coils of barbed wire lay the skeletons of soldiers in their rotting clothes. From more than one skeleton the skull had rolled some yards away. Two at least of those near Tony, if he could judge by their bottle-green uniforms, were Turkish officers. He stood erect and looked about him. At the cliff end of this desolate flat was a group of men, moving against the sky; and one of them was a short childish figure who—yes, a nearer view confirmed the impression—was wearing a violet stole over his khaki jacket.

Tony drew close. It was Padre Quickshaw addressing himself, with the aid of a Burial Party of the 15th, to the cleaning up of the Peninsula. The men were going with their spades from skeleton to skeleton and digging for each a rude grave, in which they laid him, and pushed back the earth, while the padre said the Committal Sentences and the Lord’s Prayer—and said them, as Quickshaw usually did, rather angrily, with a ligament of moisture forming at his lips.

Tony was in time to watch a curious incident. One skeleton of abnormal length that lay almost on the brink of the precipitous cliff had a shell standing upright beside it, with the nose-cap screwed on. Perhaps because its upright position suggested a human agency, Quickshaw unscrewed the cap and examined the interior of the shell.

“Ha! Thought so!” he muttered. “Guessed something like that!”

From within it he drew a neatly folded piece of paper. He read it and handed it to Tony, whom he had recognized.

“Looks as though someone gambled on us coming along sooner or later,” said he. “Here, get a move on, you fellows;

dig his grave. Those spades aren't chairs to sit your behinds on; we can't stay here all night."

Tony studied the paper. It looked like the torn-out fly-leaf of a cheap novel; and on it a clumsy hand had written with a copying-ink pencil the full details of the dead man: 340971 Private R. Oldways, 1/7 Lancashire Fusiliers, Killed May 6th." Thanks to the screwed-on shell-cap no rain had marred the writing.

What tale of anxious friendship explained this upright shell with its folded paper inside, who could say? One pictured a lonely figure returning after the battle to his fallen friend and placing beside him this identification paper, protected from wind and weather, in the forlorn hope that other men would one day come that way and find it. And six months later came Padre Quickshaw with his picks and spades to the dead man's side.

And, as the curious chances would have it, out stepped from among the burial party a tall man who exclaimed in a broad Lancashire accent, "Dick Oldways! *Dick Oldways!* Ah knew him. He coom fra Owdham same as Ah do." And he stared down at the elongated skeleton. "Bah gum!"

This was the first time that Jim Stott from Oldham, best of soldiers and best of friends, stood out before Tony as an individual and not as a mere name in the roll of C Company. There were reasons why Jim Stott should be remarkable; first, because it was strange, in these early years of the war when the battalions yet retained their territorial character, to find a Lancashire mill-hand in an Essex regiment; and secondly, because, unlike most of these Lancashire weavers and minders, who were short and squat, Jim was a splendid figure of a man, six feet tall, and broad and powerful. Tony watched him as he stared down at the skeleton.

"Eh, Ah knew thee, lad, in Manchester; Ah did and all," he said. "Tha were killed in May, that's reet . . . aye, and tha were a tall chap—tall as me, I reckon. Dang, Ah'd ha' coom afore if Ah'd known as how tha were here, but Ah'll bury thee now, any road." And he fell to work with his spade, saying to the other men the while: "Ah'll tell you all about him some time, happen. He were a champion lad, Dick Oldways. Aye, Ah can tell you all aboot t'mill as he coom from."

He dug for a minute, but rested on his spade again and

looked down at the skeleton. Seemingly he could not credit this meeting with Dick Oldways : it fascinated him.

"Aye, it's t'saam chap," he mused. "Ah've seen him too with his lass, walking along t'road—Ah have that. They met at Class. I'm no-but just getting all about him . . . he weren't more nor twenty, and he played for Owdham Colts i' them days. . . . H'm, he looks old enoof now, doan't he?"

And Jim Stott was digging again.

As they walked away, Quickshaw almost apologized for what he had been doing. "It isn't good for the men to see all these blooming skeletons and stiffs about. Why the devil no overfed staff officer has thought of that before and ordered their burial I can't say. God knows the staff does little enough on Gallipoli at present to earn its pay. I don't see why it should be left to me to think of these perfectly obvious things. Come and have some lunch at Brigade, if you feel like it and can put up with the Brigadier."

Quickshaw's popularity in Leigh Ravine, where sat Scrase, Moulden and O'Grogan, was as great as in any other pocket of the Peninsula : it was the popularity that a group of men will give to a pet animal whose antics amuse them ; say, a pet monkey. His protuberant eyes and his protruding mouth, both so like the features of a fish ; his sparse hairs drawn across a bald head, his perpetual indignation with someone or something, and the way he never suffered his grin to grow into a smile, or his laugh to be more than a rather angry "Haw!"—these things amused them. And when it leaked out that an October Sunday was the padre's forty-first birthday, Scrase pronounced that there was nothing for it but to give him a dinner-party in Leigh Ravine. Quickshaw spat his contempt for the notion, but consented to come ; and as an excuse for such weakness added : "To be sure, I've no desire to spend the evening with the Brigadier. The less I see of that man the better. I had another dust-up with him this morning."

"Padre ! Padre !" Scrase shook his head sadly. "Not again, not again?"

"Most certainly again," Quickshaw assured him. "This morning as ever was. The old fool started to sniff because there was nothing but bacon and apricot jam for breakfast, so I promptly——"

"Brought in the mess accounts, plumped them on the table, and told him to get on with the job himself," supplied Scrase.

"Exactly. Or, rather, I suggested that the Brigade Major or the Staff Captain might take it on, since they've nothing to do nowadays except sit on their behinds and trim their nails."

"But, padre, my dear, that was rather rude, wasn't it?"

"Can't help it. If that old fool thinks that I've nothing better to do than to go trapesing over to Imbros or Tenedos twice a week to buy him an egg, he's—he's mistaken."

"So who's running the Brigade mess now?" asked Moulden.

"Well . . ." Quickshaw looked ashamedly out to sea, and admitted with half a grin that he had consented to serve for another short period. "The Brigadier apologized, or I wouldn't have done it, you can be sure of that!"

"I'd like to hear the Brigadier apologizing," said Scrase. "How did he do it?"

Quickshaw allowed the grin to develop. "Oh, the old fool said, 'That's all right, padre; that's all right, padre. Mustn't get angry with us'; and when I assured him that it *wasn't* all right but all damn wrong, he wouldn't listen, but said sweetly, 'No, no, padre; no, no. You mustn't grow weary of well-doing. We're your flock, you know, and the Bible says you must feed your lambs'; and because I was fool enough to laugh at this, they all shouted that they were forgiven and that the padre had smiled, and there was a General Absolution, and a lot more rubbish like that—and—haw! haw!—the Brigadier pushed back the mess accounts to me and said, 'You'll keep all that bumf till next time, won't you, padre?'—and they went on with their breakfast as if all were over. But any more grousing from 'em, and I'm through with it! and as I said, the less I see of 'em all for a little while the better!"

So, the padre having consented to come, the officers of C Company hung the sandbag walls of their little mess with scrub from the ravine and with fir and heather from the uplands. Dammit, it was the C. of E. padre's birthday.

Now Hughes Anson, as we know, was a specialist in birthdays, and when the word travelled along to his trenches that Padre Quickshaw was dining with C Company that night, and inquiry elicited the reason why, he decided that such an occasion must be celebrated in other districts as well as in Leigh Ravine. How he celebrated it will shortly appear: meanwhile let it be said that Hughes Anson had early established a reputation on the Peninsula. Rosy was the "star turn" of A Company.

He was the type of officer about whom the men tell rich stories gleefully, and such a one is usually well liked and bravely followed. The men said that when he was "tuppence on the can" after dinner, he would work off his high spirits by running across No-Man's Land with a couple of cricket-ball bombs in his hands, and hurling them at the Turks, and doubling back. It was quite true; this was a favourite pastime of The Roseate Hughes when in liquor. They told how once, when there was an argument in the mess as to whether a mysterious Turkish trench was occupied or not, he stood up, pressed out his cigarette, and said that the best thing to do was to go and see; whereupon he immediately walked over to it, and looked in, and came back, saying casually, "No, there's no one there." It is an old observation that officers of this pattern often have charmed lives, and certainly Hughes Anson seemed able to walk unscathed through a darkness singing with bullets.

On the Birthday Sunday Tony chanced to meet Quickshaw an hour or two before he was due in C Company's mess. It was late afternoon, and he was climbing up a little gorge that opened out of the Gully Ravine. At the top of this Gorge were hidden the guns of the 460th Battery; and Tony, as he climbed, passed the horses of the gun teams tethered up the slopes. He was going to drink tea with a gunner officer whom he had discovered to be an Old Pauline like himself. Turning a bend in the track, he saw Quickshaw ahead of him toiling up the slope, and followed by his batman, who was carrying a sackful of army hymn-books. So? Then this meant Evensong at the battery.

Now, for a rousing Church service, go to a battery. Artillerymen are always hearty—perhaps it is something to do with their horses; they like a hearty oath, a hearty meal, and a hearty service. And a very good sight they are, the gunners and the bombardiers, when they are ready for their Church Parade; they have groomed themselves as they groom their horses; their harness glints; their spurs and buttons are a-glitter; and about their bandoliers, slung jauntily over their shoulders, there is a touch of braggadocio which makes you expect that any man may at some moment slap his chest and exclaim, "I am the Bandolero!" It is very good to see fifty or sixty of these swagger gunners drawn up for Church Parade at the top of a ravine, behind their watchful guns. No sooner has the first hymn started than you realize that, whether

or not they have come to the service to be good, they have certainly come to enjoy themselves. Here's a good hymn, they seem to say, and a good tune, so let's give tongue. Here's the end of the prayer, thank God, so all together with a snap, "Amen!" Here's another hymn, so let's all clear our throats, for we're going to make a good thing of this. Oh, this is where the sermon comes, is it?—well, let's sit down and enjoy it; he's a funny little cove, this padre, and is inclined to spit over the front rank when he's getting shirty, but he's got a head-piece on him, and he knows how to talk. Ho, one more rowdy hymn, and—heels together with a click and a clinking of spurs—"God save our gracious King, Long live our noble King." Dismiss! and back to the dug-outs, humming the hymns we have just sung.

At the 460th Battery such an Evensong was just over, and Tony was drinking his tea in the officers' mess, when there was rapid-fire along the front line, and, more surprising than this, the reverberation of the Turkish guns.

"Dammit," cried the O.C. "What the devil's that?"

The Turkish heavies, shaking the mess and rattling the crockery on the table, told pretty plainly what it was. The O.C. became restless, the junior officers witty.

"Nothing to get excited about," said they. "Johnny Turk has received some shells in his mail. Or perhaps the Germans have got through and joined up with the Turks. At any rate, it's nothing of importance."

But the O.C. remained preoccupied and impatient, and his disquiet was soon justified by the running arrival of a man with a telephone message. Instantly the O.C., having tersely said, "Battery Action," ran out of the mess and shouted orders to the men, who had thrown off their bandoliers and jackets and started on their tea.

"Battery Action" called out the men nearest.

"Battery Action": the word was flung from dug-out to dug-out, and cast like a bouncing ball down the ravine.

Men left their knives stuck in their loaves, dropped their mugs of undrunk tea or their half-smoked cigarettes, and ran to their posts by the guns. The sides of the ravine came alive with movement like a cloven ant-heap. In a little more than a minute the four guns had each a team of silent men awaiting orders; and the O.C. was standing in the middle of the space where the Church Parade had been held.

"Thirty-six right," he called.

"Thirty-six right." The word went from gun to gun.

"Three six right." With a beautiful movement the guns swung round into position.

The Turkish bombardment swelled in volume, while the 460th and the other British batteries were strangely inactive. But at last a far-away British battery made a solitary reply. Then a second endorsed it. A third added its support. And one after another they joined in the quarrel, till it seemed that of all the British batteries on Gallipoli, the 460th alone had yet to speak. The four guns stared out together towards one point. The four teams uttered not a sound, but looked for the word to the O.C. where he stood. The little space which had echoed the hymns of evensong was silent except for the birds' twittering.

Just the other side of the Gully Ravine, Y Battery was spitting flame twenty times to the minute, and receiving high-explosive shells which threw up fountains of earth and chocolate smoke into the air. Now the concentrated fire of rifles and the angry spatter of machine-guns suggested that the infantry were out. Tony became anxious about his company, but was held to his place by one of those absurd "fixed ideas" which can seize a man in such a moment: he must see the 460th open fire before he moved.

"No. 1 gun, *fire!*" said the O.C.

The gun fired.

Tony climbed down the little ravine with his right ear singing from the noise.

It was between lights by this time, and the flashes of the guns lit the white walls of the Gully with a rosy light. The Gully Ravine, along which Tony must go for a quarter of a mile, was now "unhealthy": it was being sprinkled with shrapnel bullets which were dropping as windfalls drop when a gale is blowing in the cherry trees. It was almost deserted: a few men were seeking cover against its more precipitous sides like people pressing their backs against a high wall to get shelter from the rain; sometimes a horseman, breaking the rule that ordered walking in the Gully, went cantering or galloping home through the gathering darkness; and ever and again the dispatch riders on their motor-cycles went racing out of sight with their messages.

The infantry fire of rifles and machine-guns continued

unbroken. Tony hurried—ran—sprinted. He heard a distant boom; and another, and another. That must be the Navy, the good old Navy standing by. Magnificent! His spine shivered with appreciation.

In the Mule Trench he met Hughes Anson.

"What's it all about?" he asked eagerly.

"It's the padre's birthday," said Hughes.

"Don't be a fool. What is it really?"

"It's the padre's birthday." Hughes nodded his confirmation. "It *is*. I'm rather worried about it, to tell the truth. Things have gone farther than I expected. Damn! I hope no one's killed."

And he explained. He had decided that the least they could do in honour of Quickshaw would be to fire *a feu de joie* at sundown, so, after a long deliberation on ways and means, he had sent a glowing rumour along the Brigade front that Bagdad had fallen. Well, it was a tremendous success, that rumour (said Hughes), and, as usual, when they got the news officially, the men had immediately decided to send the information over to Johnny Turk in the form of several rounds rapid. Johnny, being a born fool, had mistaken this "little bit of gaiety" as the preamble to an infantry attack, and replied with the deuce of a bombardment. Then our guns, not clear what he was up to, and certainly not disposed to let him have it all his own way, had begun to register on his batteries with a view to silencing them. And now, God help us, some old battleships had come out from Imbros to see that we were not let down, and other ships were doubtless on their way from Mudros, and poor old Achi Baba, more than ever certain that all these things meant an attack on a large scale, was engaging the Navy and playing hell with all our lines of communication. "Damn! I hope no one's killed," Hughes concluded. "I say, Bungay! Supposing a battleship's sunk with all hands."

Whether or not Hughes Anson, like a fond father, was holding too generous an opinion of the part his little rumour had played in this sudden fury it is difficult to tell. No mere subaltern knew the real cause of these quick and frequent storms on Gallipoli. But, anyhow, he need have no lives on his conscience, for nobody was killed. A few were wounded and went down the Gully that evening and on to the hospital ships bound for England. This didn't worry him at all, since he held that he had done them the kindest of services, so he

could return to his contemplation of the birthday. The result of this contemplation was that at eleven o'clock that night he appeared, a dark shape, at the door of C Company's mess where the festivities were illuminating the ravine.

"We've come for the padre," he said. "We thought some one had better take him home to Brigade."

And Scrase, Tony, Moulden and Quickshaw, looking out into the night, saw that Hughes had a following of six other officers who were standing darkly around a stretcher.

"What the devil!" began Scrase.

"We'll carry him back. He's tight by now, isn't he? If he isn't he ought to be. It's his birthday."

Quickshaw spluttered indignantly, but not without a suggestion of laughter.

"Don't be such puerile idiots!" he said.

Hughes soothed him. "Now come quietly, padre. There'll be no trouble if you don't make a fuss. We'll wait till you're ready, if you like."

"I'm not going in that thing," said Quickshaw.

"Yes, you are. You can explain what you like to the Brigade, but you've got to arrive back on a stretcher on your birthday night."

Scrase protested—but his protests were blunted by his amusement. "He's my guest. If he doesn't want to go on the stretcher, he shan't. But of course, if he likes to . . ."

"There are seven of us," Hughes indicated. "We are prepared to overcome any opposition."

Scrase turned to Quickshaw.

"What about it, padre?"

"*Paw!* If they like to make idiots of themselves," said Quickshaw, "*I* don't mind. It's they who'll look the fools, not me."

"Quite so, quite so," Hughes agreed. "Come on then, padre. Get in."

The grin was on Quickshaw's face. "Oh, I'll go with 'em, Scrase—idiots! And if they like to save me a walk——"

"Precisely!" said Hughes. "Come on, you fellows."

And on the stretcher, smoking a cigarette, perfectly comfortable and never protesting, the C. of E. chaplain returned to Brigade Headquarters, his bearers and mourners singing.

CHAPTER VII

THE PENINSULA PAIN

THEN Tony blundered. It was a small blunder, but a major one, since its consequences weaved their way like a dark central thread through the rest of his days in the army. He made his blunder, and thereafter he, who had rushed into the war hoping to escape from his petty personal cravings, found that a personal trouble in his mind was likely to grow larger than, and to eclipse, the mighty argument of a world at war.

Stagnation was on Gallipoli, and the eyes of a sick and listless army turned towards other fronts where the British were campaigning—to Mesopotamia, and East Africa, and France and the new front at Salonika—in the hope that Victory, which had taken wing and flown from their desolate plateau, might be alighting in splendour elsewhere. Great things must surely be happening on these other fronts. And Mesopotamia, where the drama of Kut was working itself out, was the front that most of all drew the eyes of Gallipoli in the later months of 1915. If the rumour that Townshend and his little force in Kut had been relieved, and that Bagdad had fallen, visited Cape Helles once, it visited it a hundred times, and the men, as we have seen, would greet it with a *feu de joie*. And when, in October, there was issued a G.R.O. inviting young officers to “transfer to the Indian Army,” all read it as a “transfer to Mesopotamia,” since the Indian Army was conducting the Mesopotamian enterprise. Tony, new to the war and still possessed with his gay delight in its romance and adventure, felt his heart leap in response to this call from Kut and the East. He discussed it with Scrase, who said, “Yes, you go, Bungay. You go and save Townshend. Why shouldn’t you? ‘Join the Army and see the world.’ There’s nothing doing here, and it looks as though there would be

a lot doing there. Besides, who wouldn't get out of this filthy hole if he had half a chance?" but when Tony asked him why, then, he didn't go himself, Scrase looked away and suggested that the matter stood differently for him, since the Royal West Essex was the battalion which he had joined in August 1914 and was minded to stay with till the end. "But I don't see why you shouldn't go. Presumably you were only seconded to us temporarily, and you may have to leave us at any time."

Tony was fond of Kit, and he was never very reasonable where he was fond: so now, though he had come to him, hoping to get encouragement in his desire to go, he was rather hurt at the readiness with which his friend offered it. Then he bethought himself that Scrase, always reticent about his emotions, was quite likely to put goods in his window which were the opposite of those he sold indoors; and he was comforted, and went off to find Moulden, to whom just now he was showing an ostentatious amity in the belief that Moulden and he were tacitly reconciled.

He found him in the Western Birdcage, a very terrible bombing pit; and here, in this most unsuitable sty, they stood face to face and discussed the matter. Moulden was as encouraging as Scrase; so encouraging that, had Tony been less ready to believe the best of men, he might have suspected that the fellow, for some hidden reasons of his own, was urging him to go. Moulden stared at him out of his dark hollow eyes, and argued the case for his going, subtly lifting it to its highest plane, subtly hinting that himself, in staying where he was, would be doing a lesser thing than O'Grogan if he answered the Mesopotamian call.

"That's right. You go," he said. "I'd go myself like a shot, only I'm a good deal older than you—really—and I've a fancy that the Peninsula, poisonous though it is, is a picnic compared with what Mespot's going to be. I mean to say, I'd go if I was ordered to, but volunteering's another matter—really. Honestly, I admire you for it, I must say."

"Its climate is undoubtedly worse," Tony allowed.

"That's right. That's what I mean. I've just managed to survive the Gallipoli heat, but I'm darned if I want to see another Eastern summer. I hear Mespot's summer is Gallipoli's multiplied by ten—really—but you're young; you can stand it."

"And it's pretty dull here," argued Tony.

"That's right. Put it like this: I mean, we don't often talk about our motives, but I take it you want to get somewhere where you can do a decent job—really; and honestly, I don't think we shall do anything more here except mark time. Whereas in Mesopotamia there's going to be a war."

"Yes, that's what I think," said Tony. "We're not going to let Townshend be captured. We daren't. If we did the East would rise."

"That's right. That's what's behind this G.R.O.—really. My gosh! you almost make me want to go too."

Other officers sang the same tune. They would leave Gallipoli like a shot—good God, yes!—only they'd not much stomach for old Mesopotamia from all they'd heard. No leave to England from there. No mails. No getting back quickly after the war was over . . . no, they'd stick it out on Gallipoli. . . .

Hughes Anson shook his inclination to go, for Hughes Anson was always so violently frank. He said, "Of course go, you fool, if you want to. You've not been very long with us, but by all means better yourself if you see a chance of it. And thank you for calling on us. . . . Have a spot of whisky. . . . Yes, you go, my boy: it might be wise. God knows how any of us are going to be got out of this bloody death-trap alive. I should 'op it, if I were you. Go while the going's good."

To which Tony at once replied, "Well, now you've said the one thing that makes it impossible for me to go."

"Oh, don't be such a bloody sentimentalist," retorted Hughes. "The British army gave up heroics soon after the first week in August, 1914. Besides, if you want to be a sentimentalist, why die here to-morrow if you can do some more work in Mesopotamia and die there next year?"

"Well, what about you, ass?" Tony demanded. "Are you going?"

Hughes looked away. "I'm not invited," he said at length. "I'm over thirty."

Tony returned to Scrase with this disturbing argument of Hughes Anson's that the British divisions could never be extricated from Gallipoli alive; and Scrase instantly made a small matter of it; though he did allow himself, illogically enough, the laughing conclusion, "Well, if old Rosy's right, so much the more reason for going."

And from all this counsel—if counsel it could be named, since it consisted, in most cases, of men saying the opposite of what they thought—Tony distilled the wrong conclusion: this was his blunder. He concluded that his mind might be at ease, and even congratulatory, about his transfer to the Indian army, but his outer manner must be one of self-depreciation and cynicism. He must make fun of his volunteering for Mesopotamia and suggest that his sole reason for clearing off the Peninsula was that he didn't like the look of things under Achi Baba—no, not in the least! There was still in him much of the "new boy" who was diligent to behave as the older boys in the school were behaving; so to the friendly voices that hailed him: "Hallo, O'Grogan! I see you're one of the volunteers?" he would answer, "Rather! what do *you* think? Three months on this foul spot is three months too long, isn't it? I'm fed up with it. And what's more, it ain't safe." And the friendly voices acknowledged his wisdom: "Quite right too! . . . Sensible feller!"

That was in October, and nothing showed Tony that he had made a mistake: the sinister little seed which he had sown lay underground, nor did it thrust a shoot above the surface in one month nor in two. For nothing immediate happened; he had imagined that he would be ordered to proceed forthwith to Lemnos or to Alexandria; and therein he showed how small was his experience of the British Army in the field; for it was not so at all; nothing happened. November succeeded October, and December November; the great blizzard came and went; the rains fell and converted the dust of the ravines into soupy water-courses; the winter seas beat menacingly round the cliffs and beaches of Gallipoli, and the ways looked very dark for the army on that narrow headland, and Tony was still with the Royal West Essex, keeping company with Scrase and Moulden and Hughes Anson, and being served by his batman, Joe Wylie. At first he supposed that his Indian Army papers were dawdling along to London; then, hearing of the enemy's submarine activity in the Mediterranean, he wondered if they had been "lost at sea"; and at length he forgot all about them. By December, had he thought of them at all, he would have been glad of their mis-carriage, for plainly it would not do to leave the battalion now. Now the Germans had forced their way through Serbia and made good their junction with the Turks, and any day Germany and

Turkey might bear down in power upon the British divisions huddled and trapped at Helles. None on Helles, in December, 1915, but knew that the army was in desperate plight.

None of the officers, that is to say. Did those patient soldiers, behind their grumbling and their laughter, ever really doubt that in one way or in another, forwards or backwards, their officers would lead them to safety? Probably not; they gave no sign that they did, for their acrid jests about the British Empire, and the Great War, and the Brass Hats meant no more now than before; they were no bitterer to-day in stagnation and defeat than yesterday on the threshold of victory. They were the same jests, angrily covering the same confidence, wilfully belying the same good nature. Ah no, it would not be good to desert these men.

Even at so late an hour in the campaign, and at so darkening and silent an hour, the men had not lost all hope of their triumphant march to Constantinople. The newspaper readers among them had a good foundation-stone for their fabric of comfort in their certainty that, since Britain could not be beaten by Turkey without losing her whole Mohammedan Empire, she was simply compelled to win on Gallipoli. The unread, having no intellectual juices for the digestion of such an argument, were content to live and breathe by the flying vapour of rumours. Fred Roberts, and Jim Stott, the gigantic fellow from Oldham, being townsmen both, were newspaper readers, and Jim a very intelligent one; Ernie Botten, the labourer from Twineham fields, had possibly opened a paper six times in his life. One night Tony was sitting on a slope of Y ravine, waiting with a party of men to fare forth on a midnight fatigue, and all these three were of the party. Ever ready to chat with his men, he presently found himself presiding at a discussion between Fred and Jim and Ernie on the fortunes of the war. Fred was in the grumbling vein—he so often was!

"Us git relieved? Nah! Don't you believe it, Ernie. We're here for the duration. They've forgotten all abaht us. They've lawst us; that's what they done. The old War Office has jest kinda mislaid the 162nd Division. In ten years time some old General in Whitehall—Whitehall's where the Government Offices are, Ernie."

"Yum," nodded Ernie, who was probably no wiser after this information than before.

"Some old General in Whitehall'll wake up and say, 'Good

Gawd! where are the Essex Division? Gawd damn it! Can't someone look up their files? Last 'eard of on Gallipoli, what? You down say so! Bless me soul. Jest write and get it confirmed that they're still there, will yer? If you can't find them offer a small reward.' See, Ernie, that's what'll happen."

"Stoof!" demurred Jim Stott, who had all the sanguine kindliness that goes with a giant's body and all the humour that goes with a good brain. "This is the calm afore the storm Ah reckon. We daren't be beaten here, tha knows; so there's summat in the wind soomwhere, tha can bet thi boots; and we'll know all aboot it soon enough. There's bin a rumour about Kitchener coomin' in person with a million lads to finish off t'show afore Christmas, and Ah shouldn't be surprised if there weren't summat to it, meself. Soom o' th'lads say as how he's already arrived at Mudros. Had you heard that, sir?" Jim Stott was bi-lingual; after talking to his fellow privates in broadest Lancashire he would quite often turn and speak to his officers in standard English. Tony admitted he had heard the rumour.

"'E's probably come to conduct the evacuation," suggested Fred Roberts grimly.

"Well, and what's wrong with an evacuation, any road?" asked Jim, executing a marvellous right-about in his argument. "Ah've no objection to evacuating t'Peninsula, meself. As a place, Ah reckon nothing to it, summah."

"No more do I," Roberts agreed. "But an evacuation ain't quite the same thing as your victory, is it?"

"Gammon! We shan't evacuate," protested Ernie Botten; but having no cogent reasons to offer why we shouldn't evacuate, he was satisfied to state it as a fact. "No, we shan't evacuate."

Jim Stott corroborated him.

"Course not, there's hoondreds o' moves we might bring off yet. Aren't there, sir?"

"Perhaps," said Tony.

"Sich as which?" demanded Fred Roberts sarcastically.

"Well, Bob Green, he makes out that one of these fine days the Turks'll see a few million Japs arriving off t' Golden Horn."

"And jist 'ow will they 'ave got there?" begged Fred.

"Worked their way across Siberia, o' course, tha silly gowk! Aye, they'll a' worked their way across Siberia, they will."

"Oh? They'll a' done that, will they?"

"Aye; and at t'saam time the Eye-talians'll have landed at Smyrna, all ready to join oop with t'Japs. That's t'rumour."

"A damn fine rumour too!"

"I *did* hear," offered Ernie Botten, "that the Russian airy-oplanes were all over Constantinople yesterday, and the ruddy place is in flames."

"Yes," said Fred Roberts, "and you've 'eard twice a week for the last three months that the Suvla army'd carried their little hill of Sari Bair; and that consequently our little Achi Baba was deserted——"

"Well——" began Ernie.

"But Sari Bair," proceeded Fred, unmindful of the interruption, "looks to me to be as sahnd as ever it was, and Achi was coughing up some nice heavy stuff at us last night. A dam-silly rumour; that's all it was."

"Well, but it'll be true one day, won't it, yer chump?" objected Ernie Botten, with simple logic.

"Will it? I *don't* think," Fred denied.

"Well, anyhow——" and the rest of the conversation was a recital by Ernie Botten of all the latest rumours from the Western front, and their denial by Fred Roberts. The German fleet had ventured out to the bombardment of Calais, and had lost eighteen vessels when attacked by the British fleet. "Not likely, Ernie!" Ostend had been captured by a landing of the British—"Don't you believe it, Ernie"—but as a reprisal, a Zeppelin had raided London and caused eighteen thousand casualties. "And do 'em good too!" The Kayser was dead—blown up in a Belgian hotel——

But this last was too much, even for Jim Stott.

"Aye," says he, "and soom o' the bits coom down in Wales, tha knows . . . eh, Ernie lad, where was tha fetcht oop?"

That was all. It was time to move, and they filed forward to their night fatigue, up the foot-track of the ravine and over the plateau under view of the Turks; their silence broken only by an occasional voice: "Keep touch. . . . *Put that light out!* . . . Break step."

So their levity, their cynicism and their hope. And yet—and yet, over-spreading the Gallipoli plateau, there was a peculiar pain which could sometimes wear through this laughing veneer

and release a poor breaking humanity beneath. Tony was to visit other fronts of the World War, but never again did he find quite the same wear and sadness as he remembered on Gallipoli; they seemed happier battlefields, for all their heavier gunfire, than that old, far-off plateau, under its hill of Achi Baba and its Levantine stars.

The Peninsula pain! Did some of its causes lie in the land itself—that elevated wilderness of scrub and heather, where the summer heat and dust and flies were followed by the winter chills and mud; that cramped headland where there was escape nowhere from the ranging shells and the marching dysentery, where none ever saw a woman or a child but only the dull khaki of sick and over-worked soldiers, where the brightest spots in all the brown desolation were the red tabs on the staff officers' jackets, and God knows that these flowers brought little delight to anyone; that sea-girt country of the untimely dead, whose bodies, buried and unburied, were almost as numerous as the men who walked among them; that spit of land, with its beaches lashed by choppy seas, where the ships must unload before all things ammunition and food, so that timber was scarce and the dug-outs bad and the water chlorinated and the comforts negligible, and the mails from home and friends took five weeks to arrive if they arrived at all; this narrow and beleaguered scene, lying quiet but restless beneath its intangible atmosphere of defeat?

Perhaps there was something in Tony—an Irish affectionateness, let us say—that enabled him to perceive this pain more easily than most, and even encouraged one or two to speak with him as they spoke with no other. There had been "Little Willie" Sparrow who broke down by his side on the firing step. And now there was Art Webster.

No one would have supposed that Art Webster, Moulden's batman, had "got religion." Nor had he, in the evangelist's use of that phrase; he was a laughing, blaspheming, would-be comedian of thirty, who tried to model himself on Joe Wylie, but the rôle of the "funny man" came less naturally to him. He had less natural force than Joe; he was an echo rather than an original noise; whereas Joe was nothing if not an original noise. Thin and sallow, with a toothbrush moustache, and a cigarette behind his ear—and with his wit so palpably effortful because the root of the man was serious and sentimental—Art Webster made an excellent foil or "opposite" to Joe.

Hear Art Webster and Joe, as the shells come shrieking towards their cookhouse this morning. *H'wish . . . plonk!* The fire and the saucepans and Art and Joe, all four, are hidden behind a dense cloud. As the cloud ascends and blows away, Joe is seen in the smoke, like Pluto at the mouth of Hell, waving a ladle above his head triumphantly and yelling, "It missed me! It missed me!" Gathering by the roars of laughter that his turn is a success, he splutters with laughter himself, passes his hand along his lank moustache, and yells again, "It missed me! It missed poor old Joe Wylie!" And Art rises from his stomach, brushing his shirt and saying to the shell, "Pass friend, all's well." Another boom from the Turkish lines. "'Old tight!" shouts Joe. "Now 'old tight, all." And Art, already prone again, cries, "What are you ducking for, Joe? The bloody shell ain't 'it yer yet. Gaw! I believe you're afraid." The shell whistles over their heads and explodes lower down the hill. Joe stands up, and looks in the direction of the distant Turks, and lifts his ladle in a vague warning to Achi Baba. "'Ere! What's to do with yer, Abdul? What's to do with yer? Jest you stop it. I shan't speak twice." And likewise Art Webster stands there and rebukes the Turkish air: "Give over, Johnny! Give over now! Can't you see that I want to get on with me dinner?" In answer comes a third shell; and Joe throws one look towards Constantinople and turns an offended back to it. "I done with yer, John. There now! I done with yer. I said as I should." And Art tosses his ladle away and stands with arms akimbo, in a dignified patience. "Well, I shan't get on with me dinner, that's all. I'll leave it be. A bit thick, coming it dirty like that, jest as I want me dinner."

And yet, one day in talkative mood, Art Webster confessed to Tony that he was "that down sometimes, never hearing nothing from his missus, and all, and what with this blasted diarrhoea, he could wish he was really religious again and could pray proper like he done when he was a nipper; and soon he was inquiring of Tony whether, for his part, he believed that in the event of a loose sort of feller like hisself being killed, he would ever meet his missus and his nippers again. It would make it kinda easier for him, if he thought he would, said Art Webster, "'cos I reckon I'm fonder of my missus than I knew, sir. I dessay you won't believe it, sir, but t'other night when the mail come, and there was nothin' in it for me,

I jest went off by meself and did a proper old blubber. Straight I did."

And Jim Stott : you shall hear a tale of Jim Stott, that good-natured fellow from Oldham. Once when the R.W.E.s were in reserve, there was a concert improvised among them by Padre Quickshaw : and it was held on a hill-slope near Gully Beach, and attended by a General and his staff. The rake of this theatre floor was tilted the wrong way ; the audience sat on an upward slope and the performers sang above them ; and the indifferent stars looked on. There were humorous songs that drew much laughter ; there were clean jokes (a few) and dirty ones ; and there was "Gungha Din." And there were songs by men who requested the Master of the Ceremonies that their contribution should be announced as "Sentimental."

"Private Jones. Sentimental," shouted Quickshaw, and seemed disgusted at having to shout anything so stupid.

Now the men dearly loved these sentimental songs, especially those that spoke of a grey-haired mother's tears, or of a sailor son sleeping in his watery grave. If there was a death in the last verse, and the singer interpreted it with dramatic effect—as he generally did, drawling it painfully—he was certain to evoke an uproar of clapping and cheers and cat-calls. And songs about home too ; they listened to these in a tense silence and with staring eyes ; for they were very homesick, one and all, and liked their sickness indulged. So we see the astonishing fact that men who would have died rather than speak in ordinary conversation about their love of the homeland, unless, to be sure, they spoke of it in ridicule, were quite ready to hear an allusion to it, provided the allusion was arranged in a metrical form and set to a melody ; exactly as they were quite ready to bawl on Church Parade "Jesu, lover of my soul, Let me to thy bosom fly"—words which, if they had given a moment's thought to their meaning, would have sent the blood and the sweat mounting to their brows for shame at having uttered them.

Now Jim Stott fancied his singing voice not lightly, and his singing style ; and of a surety the former was very good and the latter remarkable, for it achieved the most lugubrious wail by the slurring of each note into the next. He favoured the company with two songs, one comic and one sentimental. "Private Stott. Comic," announced Quickshaw sadly ; and Jim Stott began :

"Wheer hadst tha' bin when Ah seed thee
On Owdham Edge bout 'at,
"Tha'd bin a coortin' Mary Jane
On Owdham Edge bout 'at. . . .

The song drew applause, though not enough, one would have imagined, to warrant an encore; but either Jim Stott, in the flush of his big effort, heard a more enthusiastic applause coming up the slope than was actually there, in which case he did not differ from many another artist, or he had come prepared to do a double turn and was resolved to go through with it, let the people cry for it or not—in which case, too, he was well within the profession's traditions. So Quickshaw announced that Private Stott would kindly oblige again with a sentimental song, "The Dear Homeland." And if the success of "Owdham Edge" was dubious there could be no question about the popularity of "The Dear Homeland." It must have been, one thinks, a trashy song, for its words, so far as they come back to one across the years, ring somewhat thus :

"Homeland, homeland, when shall I see you again? . . .
Land of my birth, dearest place on earth,
It may be for years, it may be for ever—
Dear homeland, good-bye."

But how those words captured and held this audience of tired soldiers, seated in rows and tailor-wise on a slope at Gully Beach; while the indifferent stars looked on! These listeners trained their eyes like searchlights on the singer. In their emotion they pulled more strenuously at their pipes, or let them go out. When the chorus freed their voices, they matched them to the drawling tones of the singer; and the result was a sound as of a thousand penitents chanting a *Miserere*. "It may be for years, it may be for ever . . ." the psalm rolled out to sea like a moaning wind. The chorus completed, they gave a round of clapping to show that the song was going well, and then, greater tribute to the singer, relapsed into an utter stillness, that they might drink deep of the second verse. And Jim Stott put all that was in him into that second verse—but he never finished it. . . . It is not easy to tell of thee, thou giant, Jim Stott, who came from the land of clogs and mills where men may feel emotion but do not show it; still, let the story go. Jim's voice began to tremble, and at the second chorus, "Homeland, homeland, when shall I see you again?"

he gulped and broke down in tears like an overwrought woman, and walked hurriedly from his earthy platform. And the incident seemed hardly painful; just natural and inevitable. For a moment the collapse of Jim Stott charged the air with a sympathy that swelled the throat and moistened the eye of many another; and then the concert went on. "Private Webster. Comic." "Good old Art! Come on, Arty."

Ah, but these are stories of the perished years, and of men who have passed and are gone; one wonders who will heed them and believe. A few, perhaps. Some will think them in ill accord with their ideas of English reserve and phlegm; and so they are; but those who cut their homes out of the distant earth of the Peninsula will remember and understand.

CHAPTER VIII

THE QUARTERMASTER SPEAKS

ALTHOUGH the Royal West Essex went sometimes into "rest," moving back into the sheltered dug-outs on Geogheghan's Bluff, or into the reserve trenches of the Eski Line, they always returned to the same western sector of the firing line; and the officers of C Company were able to lease anew, and not unhappily, their "seaside bungalows" in Leigh Ravine. It was as if Divisional Headquarters were too disheartened nowadays to trouble about moving a brigade from one sector to another. Usually the battalion was happier in the line than in reserve: in the line there was little to do but stand to arms at sunrise and sunset, and cast a friendly bomb at the Turks once or twice between meals; but in reserve—ach! to hell with it!—there were digging fatigues and water fatigues and ration fatigues; and probably twice as many shells. And the Gallipoli plagues were as bad in Geogheghan's Bluff as they were in Leigh Ravine.

The programme of plagues had now reached the mice and the mud items—the lice being a permanent accompaniment—not to say a running accompaniment. The mice in the dug-outs were an accursed thing. Scarcely would Tony be rolled up in his blankets and thinking of sleep when they would begin their operations. They issued from holes in the sandbags and brought down a landslide of earth, in which, by some mischance, themselves would often come hurtling down. They ran over the floor, upsetting the bottles; they gnawed the two large egg crates which constituted Tony's bed; they pushed their noses into any food which was not in Julianne tins, and into much that was so closeted, by effecting an entrance over the parapet and under the lid; they nibbled the Sam Browne belt and the revolver holster; and they tore up the newspapers and carried off portions of the *Sunday Times* and *Punch*

to read in their dug-outs. The officers organized "battery actions," in which they sat in the dark in one another's dug-outs, armed with entrenching tools to slay them at sight. One morning Hughes Anson brought a bayonet into Tony's dug-out, and fondling it and flashing it in the sun, said, "See that? That's killed four."

"What, Turks?" asked Tony.

"No, fool, MICE."

And another day he brought three of them impaled on the bayonet to C Company, as an offering to their Mess stores.

Sometimes it seemed a shame to kill them, they were such pretty little creatures, with ears like tiny gramophone trumpets and long tails; and perhaps their irruptions only meant that they had lost their timorous natures and were resolved to be neighbourly, now that men, by burrowing in the earth and sleeping under the roots, had shown such a kinship with themselves.

When the mice subsided, one tried to capture sleep before they should begin again, but in the quiet and the warmth the lice began.

Abandoning sleep on such a night, Tony lit his candle-lantern and put on woollen gloves and wrote to Honor.

"My Dearest Honor,

"Hughes Anson of whom I have told before, is a humorous cove, and whenever the rain is drenching into his dug-out, and a gusty wind is trying to carry off the ground-sheets which are all he has for roof, and he can't lace them together because the rain is pouring down his arms and his neck, he just sits down with his feet in the dissolving floor and says, 'Well, I'll write to my wife; that's all.' I feel rather in that mood now; so here goes.

"The most glorious parcel arrived from you yesterday with those pants. The pants are topping—most welcome; because lately I have been feeling rather cold about my peninsulas. Tell the Working Party that the louse-proof shirts were very popular with the men, to whom I issued them. When I asked Fred Roberts and Jim Stott and others if they'd like a medicated shirt, they said, 'Well, sir, I don't mind if I do;' which is their way of saying 'Thanks awfully.' The fl nets were too late to be of use this year, but they will be invaluable on the Peninsula during the summers of 1916, '17, '18, and '19 (for we expect to be here for ever). All the flies (1915 model) were killed in the great blizzard. What we are suffering from now is mice and

lice. Some say the mice are not mice at all, but some kind of jerboa. I don't know. At any rate they keep us awake all night. They run over our beds and chew the string and sick it up on the floor; and you can never sleep, can you? when there's someone retching in the room.

"This morning I taught my servant, Joe Wylie, who is an excellent cook, to do some onions with sugar in the way you used to do them when we were first married. Kit Scrase, after sampling them, said he'd have plain boiled onions in future, but he's often rude. I think perhaps I put in too much sugar, because it was rather like onions and treacle. But the smell carried me right back to the little kitchen at Sheep's Eye and the garden outside, and the Sussex weald stretching to the foot of Wolstonbury. Moulden and I are now getting on awfully well. He's not a saint; in fact he's essentially a liar and a sneak and a slacker; he has not done a stroke more work than he's obliged to since I've known him; but he likes to see me working. En passant, while I have been writing to you, I have caught a couple on my arm.

"I am afraid this is one of my silly letters, but the reason is that, in spite of everything I feel so thundering well. The cold snap broke on the last day of November, and the first part of December has been glorious. The Government has done its duty by us nobly; they land fresh meat every day when the seas permit.

"At present I am living on Brooke's topping sonnets in '1914'—you've heard of him, I hope; he died in these parts. They just get me, somehow. The few poems I sent you of my own are absolute tosh compared with his."

In these days the trenches and mule-saps and the cart road down the Gully Ravine were ankle-deep in mud; or, after a heavy rainfall, were trickling burns and running streams; and Tony, going about his daily occasions, had long resigned himself to the habit of paddling through them and changing into dry garments when he got home. So had Padre Quickshaw, who probably walked more miles each day than any other man on the Peninsula. Padre Quickshaw was getting very irritable with it all; and one morning, seeing Tony's boots and puttees plastered with red mud, he seemed to realize, as in a vision, the full force of Cosmic Evil; and he declared abruptly:

"I'm not going on with it! My waders are worn out, and I've only one pair of boots that keeps out the water. Either I'll get one of the quartermasters to give me a couple of pairs of artillery boots, or I'll jack everything up."

"Jove!" cried Tony. "I'd like a pair of those topping lace-up boots that the transport men wear. Do you think old Grimsby 'd give us some?"

"I shall see to it that he does. We'll go and tackle him now. If he refuses—well, let him! The Principal Chaplain says he'll transfer me to Alexandria the minute I tell him I need a change. And I shall go! *I've* no desire to stay here and be killed."

So they set off to visit Grimsby at his Dump, in the Gully Ravine. Quartermaster Grimsby was one of the "characters" of the Royal West Essex; such a character as only the world's armies produce, but they abundantly. Before receiving his commission as Honorary Lieutenant and Quartermaster, he had been, of course, a sergeant; and, except for the two stars on his shoulder-strap, he was a sergeant still—with his six-foot height, his out-thrown chest, his clipped, concise moustache and his florid skin. He had also served, for a period, as a cavalry riding-master; and, if the language of a sergeant is notorious, what shall be said of that of a cavalry riding-master? The foul flow that issued from Quartermaster Grimsby, when provoked, was enough to arrest a shell in mid-air and send it flying back for very shame into the nozzle of its gun.

So far he was no more than true to a common type; but with these ordinary qualities he contrived to mix those of an ardent High Churchman, full of controversies, texts, expositions and proselytizing zeal; and the mixture, at least to a civilian mind, was rich and rare. Grimsby was Acting Transport Officer as well as Quartermaster, and had command over an attachment of turbanned Indians and swarthy Zionists who lived along his transport lines; these "niggers"—they were all "niggers" to him—he hated roundly, but he hated the mere mental conception of a Nonconformist far more. The sight of a terrified Zionist skulking under the belly of his mule when the shelling began could not draw from him such a vocabulary—though it did well—as the mere whisper of the word Methody. His temper, when inflamed with religious controversy and with whisky, could attain such heat that Tony, let it be said frankly, was afraid of him, and had not hitherto amassed enough courage to visit him and beseech a free issue of boots and winter clothing. He was apprehensive now as he walked down the Gully with Quickshaw, but there

was no trace of anxiety about the protruding eyes and carp-like mouth of his friend.

Grimsby's Dump was piled about one of those recesses in the Gully where the high cliff walls had caved in and softened into a gentle slope; and as they came within view of it, they saw the soldierly figure of Grimsby standing at his dug-out door and staring in their direction.

"Good God, here's the parson!" he cried. "Hi, there! you loafers! Get on your feet"—this to the transport men, Zionists and Indians—"and 'Shun! No—As you were! 'SHUN! Why the hell don't you salute the Church properly? Bloody heathens! . . . Well, sir, come in"—this to Quickshaw—"and don't say you've come to stop me swearing, because it's been tried before. Come and have a drink."

They passed under the low door of his dug-out, which, being a quartermaster's, was luxuriously furnished: it had a low table, and six chairs, and an oil stove, and blankets for tapestry all round its sandbagged walls.

"What'll you take, sirs? Whisky? Gin? Rum? Lime-juice?" He had returned to the door. "Wandsworth! Damn that lad, where is he? *Wandsworth!* He was sent to me for light duty, and, poor boy, he's done more work running up and down these steps, bringing drinks for visitors, than ever he's done in his life before. One of you chaps find Wandsworth and tell him to get Holy Church a drink. Look alive: get a *jeldi* on about it! Now then, gentlemen, sit down. You, sir?" He pushed a chair for Tony and sat on another himself, continuing: "Well, Father, you'll have your drink in a minute. But tell me: you haven't come for my soul's good, have you?"

"I've come for a pair of boots," said Quickshaw. "And for some thick pants and a pair of tommy's serge trousers."

"The devil you have!" Grimsby's eyebrows shot up. "Hark at that now! Boots, pants, and serge slacks! And what else can I do for you? Will you have a couple of water-carts and a double-bodied limber?"

Quickshaw grinned. "No, thank you. Those few things will be enough."

"Splendid! Will you have 'em now, or when you get 'em?"

"Now, thank you."

"Right: will you have 'em on issue or on payment?"

"What's the difference?"

"The difference is that you have 'em on issue if the Quartermaster is in a good temper, and on payment if he's got a liver."

Quickshaw immediately put his hand into his pocket, prepared to pay; at which Grimsby laughed noisily and exclaimed, "No, Father, no. I'm a sweet-tempered man at bottom. Put up thy purse into its sheath, and take thy bill and write fifty. . . ." With this quotation he got up and went to the door. "Hallo!" he called all over the Peninsula. "Where's that bloody storeman? Find the best pair of ankle boots you've got—hallo, wait a minute!—what's that, padre? Not ankle boots? All right—No, the Church wants artillery boots and some winter pants and a good pair of serge slacks. And get the same for this other officer—I take it that's what you've come for, isn't it, sir? Nobody comes to see me unless it's to get something—and for mercy's sake, man, jump to it! Get a move on! Don't you realize the devil is making headway all the time the Church is kept waiting for trousers?"

Returning, he sat down and poured out a glass of whisky and water, and emptied it at a gulp. Apparently the drink had deranged the air in his throat, for he was obliged to make some minor adjustments there, and one major one, before he could proceed with his talk. These affairs in order, he wiped his lips with a khaki handkerchief, and his eyes as well, and turned to Quickshaw.

"You know, sir, I quite agree with you that this swearing is no sense at all. But I can't help it. Over and above my own transport fellows, they give me these bloody Indian mule-drivers, and these Syrians, Ethiopians, Jews, Turks, Infidels, and what not, that go to make up the Zion Mule Corps. What a name for the smelly skunks, Zion Mule Corps! Spies, every one of 'em, I'll be bound; and if I'd a firing party, I'd send 'em to Zion."

"They're nothing of the sort; they're splendid little fellows," protested Quickshaw, who would certainly have decried them had Grimsby praised instead of attacking them.

"Are they?" scoffed Grimsby. "*You* try and drive them up to the Line when there's a strafe in the Gully. My crikey, if *you'd* got to get the rations through a bombardment, with nothing but Indian drivers and these Jerusalem artichoke fellers to carry 'em, *you'd* swear till you were blue.

The other day I was letting 'em have it in sound English, and throwing in a bit of Hindustani as well; and I said to 'em, 'If there's any truth in the teaching of the Church of Rome, I'll get a thousand years in purgatory for this!' And just then who should I see beside me but the R.C. padre, who often comes in for a drink. So I said, 'Well, if your reverence *will* come along in your slipper, Jesuitical fashion, you must expect to hear things,' and indoors we went and had a jolly crack about the Pope. I like the R.C.s; it's these oily, teetotal, 'brothers-shall-we-now-sing-a-hymn?' United Board Methodies that I can't stand."

Evidently Grimsby thought he had better explain himself to Tony, for he turned to him and said:

"You see, sir, I've been choirboy, choirman, and choir-master now for forty-five years, and ha! ha! once I thought I'd done for myself with the vicar. It was in a choir practice, and the lad at the organ was murdering a chant—simply murdering it. Now I'm fond of music, I am, and it so got my rag out that I thought I was in the army and shouted 'Come away from the bloody thing and let me play it.' The vicar was properly up in the gills about it, and slanged the boys like a sergeant-major because they laughed. I was afraid for a time he'd stop me taking my Sunday Bible class—oh, yes, I've a weekly class of young men, and they get pretty honest talks from me—straight from the shoulder, I can tell you. If one of 'em gets tight or swears, he's *for* it. Absolutely *for* it. I won't have 'em swearing: one's bad enough, especially if it's the teacher. So the lad gets it; and what I used to say on the parade ground to a fellow who started off with the right foot isn't in it with what I give this poor boy. And the result is that they're a fine, upstanding group of lads. . . . And that reminds me, Father, I want something from you. I've lost my prayer-book, and I want one of your little testaments which have the psalter bound up with 'em. You see, sir"—he had turned to Tony—"when I'm feeling down, in this vile sump-hole of a place, I like to look up the psalms. Somehow I always get what I want out of them."

Quickshaw put his hand in his pocket and drew out a little khaki testament, which he tossed across to Grimsby: his action suggested, "Have it if you want it—I'm sure *I* don't—and now let's get on to something else." Grimsby seized the book, and was profuse in his delight.

"Give me the psalms!" he cried, opening it up. "The psalms every time! Listen: 'When Israel came out of Egypt, and the land of Judah from among a strange people.' That's the pukka tune, isn't it? Heavens, I haven't been an organist for nothing. Now here we are—very softly, please"—he conducted himself with a table knife: "'Wash me thoroughly from my wickedness: and cleanse me from my sin'—now then, you basses!—'For I acknowledge my faults: and my sin is ever before me.' Yes, the basses may well sing that, the s—s!" Oh, it's lovely! It makes me wish I was home again and in me surplice on Sunday evening. It's on Sunday evenings out here, sir, that I get the blues more than any other time."

The mention of Sunday evenings set them comparing their Sunday evenings in exile on this barren soil with the happy, quiet Sunday evenings at home. Grimsby drew a word-picture of himself and his wife, whom he called "little Jimmy," and his tall daughter, "Doodles," and his small boy, "the Sergeant-Major"—all gathered round the piano singing hymns before bedtime. Somewhat excited by further noggins of whisky, he insisted that Quickshaw must give his Dump an Evensong next Sunday—next Sunday afternoon as ever was. "I'll rope in the boys, Father; never you fear! Yes, that's fixed up! By jove, yes, isn't it, Father?"

Quickshaw nodded his assent, and Grimsby tried to make him drink another whisky on the strength of it.

"We must wet next Sunday's Evensong; come along. . . . And you, sir, too. I liked you from the first, sir, and I like you still better now you say you're a parson's son. You must come to church next Sunday and hear our service. It'll be a service worth hearing. I'll see to that! Damn, I'll have a choir trained between now and Sunday. But as I was saying, I like you. You've got some modesty about you—not much, but some. What I can't stand is these little twopenny-halfpenny twenty-year-old captains with one year's service, who try to lord it over us quartermasters, just because we happen to be only two-lieuts. Here am I, after forty years' service, with only two stars on my shoulders, and there's that little snipe of an Eadie with three stars, and Adjutant to the battalion. I saw him home properly the other day, when he tried to tick me off about some rations; I told him I was soldiering and in command of men while he was at his mother's breasts. Oh, and I must tell you this"—they had got up to go. "I must just

tell you this : some time ago I had him properly. He rang me up and told me I must send up rations for two hundred because a new draft had just come in. So I said, 'Ring off, my lad, ring off; you're on the wrong number'; so he said, 'Why, isn't that the 15th R.W.E. Dump?' and I said, 'Yes, but you ring off and get on to the Kingdom of Heaven. Our Blest Redeemer fed five thousand men with enough rations for ten, but I ain't acquired His skill yet.' "

It was difficult to get away, so talkative had Grimsby become. At the door of the dug-out he must begin to expound to Quickshaw his own ideas of what a pukka chaplain should be. "The parson oughtn't to go among the men so that they're terrified lest he's going to say 'Let us pray' at any minute. What he wants to do is to barge into their tent and greet 'em, 'Hallo, boys, damn your eyes, all, and how the devil are you?' Then he'll begin to make headway with them. You take my word for it; I'm an old soldier and I know. . . . Well, good-bye, sir; you mustn't mind me and my talk. The Father here understands me. Don't forget Sunday."

That Sunday Evensong at Grimsby's Dump! Tony never forgot it. He walked to it with Quickshaw, who expressed all the way his suspicions that it was more likely to be a choir practice conducted by the Quartermaster than a service conducted by him, and that he wasn't going to stand it. No, he wasn't going to fall for that sort of thing. Sometimes Grimsby was too much of a good thing altogether.

And when they arrived there was everything to strengthen his suspicion. All the transport men, and a crowd of visitors from other settlements in the Gully, were there in a military semi-circle around the tall figure of Grimsby, who was conducting a last dress-rehearsal of the hymns. Heaven knows what mixture of exhortation and frightfulness he had employed to induce among such a number of men this godly disposition to worship. It looked as if even the Zionists had been impressed into the congregation to swell its proportions. Wandsworth, the Quartermaster's batman, had been entrusted with the distribution of the hymn-books, and the voice of his master could be heard goading him into expeditious movement.

"Now then, O.C. Hymn Books, get a move on. Here are half a dozen chaps picking their teeth and waiting for hymn-books. Hustle 'em about. We're feeling very pious just now, but we can't keep it up all night. It's rather a strain on

some of these fellows. Ah, here's the father! They've all got hymn-books now, padre. We're going to open with 'Abide with Me.' You don't mind, do you? It's number one in the book, boys. I'll lead off."

The hymn started, and the Quartermaster controlled it splendidly, his fine voice (of which he was obviously proud) leading the congregation, and his cane enforcing now a *pianissimo*, now a *fortissimo* effect.

When the hymn was over, Tony supposed that Grimsby would step aside and yield the floor to Quickshaw. But not so. During the last verse Grimsby had turned back in his little Army hymn-book to the form of Evening Prayer; and directly the Amen had faded away, he suggested a General Confession with the words, "Now, boys, suppose we tell the Almighty we're a blooming lot of rotters. It's not far from the truth. You'll find it on page ten."

During the resulting Confession Tony, a clergyman's son, began to suffer a great trepidation lest the Quartermaster should pronounce the Absolution, which was printed next. But it was the Absolution that saved the day. Grimsby was too good a churchman not to know that, for this incident at least, he must hand over the parade to the chaplain. And Quickshaw, having entered into possession, did not allow himself to be shouldered out again. Throughout the remainder of the service Grimsby became merely the loudest voice in the congregation and the foreman of the jury when the padre asked, "What hymn shall we have next?" It was not until Quickshaw had concluded his sermon and given the Benediction that the Quartermaster could take up the reins once more. Then, as if loth to see this magnificent congregation disperse, he stepped forward and addressed it. He was going to propose, he said, a vote of thanks to the parson for coming and giving them a service. But his speech quickly left this secular ground; it put on pious clothes, went to church, and became a sermon. All knew that they were back in the service again when he got in a well-meant but rather back-handed compliment to Quickshaw. "These blinking shells," he said, "are the best sermon we've had to-day. One of them going off like the Judgment Day ten paces to your rear will do more to put the fear of God into you than all the dear padre's sermons put together. Now, boys, the one redeeming feature——"

The sweat stood on Tony's brow as Grimsby dropped into

this phrase. He was for ever employing it without any thought as to what it meant. On his lips it stood for "the best thing about," and sometimes the results of this misuse were appalling ; as now :

"The one redeeming feature of the padre's sermon was the way in which he dwelt upon the manhood of our blessed Lord, and how He knew what suffering was and the temptation to be afraid. Now, if I get the wind up when one of these five-nine's comes along, I want to ask the Almighty, don't I, for sufficient guts to put a brave face on the matter. Now, boys, what would be the use of my asking Him for strength if I didn't know that He knew exactly what I was feeling like, because He'd been through much the same Himself ? No, take it from me, lads, the one redeeming feature about our blessed Lord was that He was a man like ourselves——"

Tony went cold, but the orator, meaning nothing but good, pursued his way.

"Frankly, boys, I'm sorry for any lad on this hell of a Peninsula who isn't a Christian. It seems to me he's walking about without equipment or rations. I recommend you all to indent on the padre for a pukka Christian outfit. He's got the goods, you know. I'd have you all confirmed and going regular to his Holy Communion. Now shall I tell you how the Holy Communion strikes me ? I'm married, you know, and my wife, whom I call 'little Jimmy,' is a good Christian woman. Well, she went last Sunday to her Holy Communion, in our parish church at home, and of course she went at eight o'clock in the morning. So I went off at about ten o'clock to where the dear old padre here was having one of his Communion services in this con-founded Gully—because I reckon that what's ten o'clock in the Gully is eight o'clock in Thamesmouth. So there we were, little Jimmy and me, both at it together, for all practical purposes. I tell you straight, boys, it's only when I'm kneeling at the padre's little altar here that I feel really close to little Jimmy—almost as if she were kneeling at my side. Yes, to my mind that's the one redeeming feature about the Holy Communion. . . . By gosh, we hear a lot about the Communion of Saints, but I tell you, the Communion of Saints isn't in it, sometimes, with me and my Jimmy. . . ."

CHAPTER IX

WAVE TO HELLES

THE fear darkened over Gallipoli. New guns on Achi Baba were pounding the beaches; faster and larger aeroplanes were flying over the lines of communication, and flying daringly low, as if Germans sat at their joy-sticks; heavier shells and bombs were falling on plateau, ravine, and nullah. The Germans had come.

They had blasted their road through Serbia and joined up with the Turks, bringing new guns, new ammunition, new men, and a new heart. And there was little response on those edges of the Peninsula where the British invaders lay: no reinforcements came to them, nor rumour that they were to move forward or to move back; and meanwhile Winter tossed up the seas behind, and their jetties broke. They lay there, believing that either the move forward or the move back was impossible. What would happen, who should say? They shrugged their shoulders.

December was half-way through when Scrase came to Tony, possessed of a secret story.

"Hush, not a word, Bungay! not a word! There's to be an advance."

"An advance!" exclaimed Tony. "It's imposs., old man, absolutely imposs.: we haven't the men."

"Nevertheless, in about five days from now, we're going to put up a hell of a show."

Tony stared at him, and saw that he was speaking the truth.

"Honour bright?" he asked.

"Yum."

A tremor, not of fear but of exultation, rushed up Tony and lifted his breast. There was that in him, as he had often confessed, which defied his brain and delighted in war. And we may tell, moreover, that this boy who, in his theories

at least, could climb to unworldly heights and detach himself from men's praise or blame, was really possessed by an ambition to perform some prodigious gallantry which should earn him the plaudits of an army. Sometimes he had thought of imitating Hughes Anson's escapades, but, so sensitive was he in reality to the opinions of men, he feared to be called a "copy cat." *Now*, though; *now* the hour had come!

Such was the vision that flashed upon his mind as he heard Kit Scrase's news; but all he said was: "I suppose the idea is that we are to sell our lives as dearly as possible."

"Perhaps," nodded Scrase. "And they're going to do something at Suvla too; and there's talk of the monitors trying to rush the Narrows. But, for the love of Mike, say nothing about it. No one's supposed to know."

"Right-ho. Shush, everybody."

Scrase had hardly left him to his excited thoughts before Joe Wylie came up the slope, bringing a very knowing look.

"Mr. Scrase bin talking abaht this 'ere attack, I s'pose, sir?" he asked.

"What do *you* know about it?"

"Law love yer; they're talking abaht it in every trench. It's in four or five days' time, they say, and the Navy's going to 'ave a shot at getting them monitors through the Narrers. And I reckon it's all dam-silly—mezelf."

"Why?"

"Because, sir, even if we take a trench or two, we ain't got the men to follow up. Reckon they want to kill us all awf, before the end, so's to save our fares back. However, let's git on with it." Joe began to busy himself about the dug-out. "What Teacher says, goes."

A few minutes later came Moulden down the track of Leigh Ravine, returning from Battalion Headquarters. He stopped, and his deep-set eyes looked into Tony's.

"Well, O'Grogan," he began significantly. "I suppose you wish now that your Indian Army papers had gone through—really?"

Moulden was one of those people whose eyes looked straight and long into yours—only too straight and too long—as if they were doing it deliberately lest you should call them shifty-eyed. He would even make his glance tremble with friendliness as he fixed it on you. But you were not deluded; you could feel, though you could not see, another man hidden behind his

eyes, and him a lonely soul, busy with clandestine thoughts. Tony had never felt this secreted watcher quite so clearly as to-day. He stared back and snapped, "No! Thank you very much, Moulden, but I don't."

Moulden sensed the hostility and tried to blow it away on a laugh.

"Well, *I* should, if I were you. I mean to say: given half a chance I'd take the first boat and put a hundred miles between myself and W beach."

"Well, I shouldn't, you see," Tony snapped.

"No?" Moulden laughed, determined to be friendly. "I'm only quoting what you used to say—really. You used to say, 'Three months on this foul spot is three months too long.'"

"We say a lot of dam-silly things."

Moulden turned his face away.

"Well, I don't know. Put it like this: they may be jokes to you, but they're just about the truth to me. I never was the 'little hero.' Do you think that if I volunteered, they'd give me a job as Burial Officer in Alex.? That's more my line—really."

Words leapt to Tony's lips: "I should drop that attitude, Moulden; it sits well on most of the other fellows, but somehow it doesn't fit you;" but he held them back.

"I wonder what came of those papers, though—really," continued Moulden. "I mean: it's months since you sent 'em in, isn't it?"

"I really forget," said Tony shortly. "Anyhow they don't interest me now. And I say, do you mind if I push off, Moulden? I've something rather important to do——"

"No, not at all, not at all," Moulden laughed. "I always like to see keenness. But here!—wait a jiffy—you're not going to Battalion Headquarters by any chance, are you?"

"No. Why?"

"Oh, nothing—really."

"I'm going to the trenches."

"The trenches. Pooh! no accounting for tastes. Well, so long, Bungay; trust in God and keep your head down."

"So long."

Tony was not going to the trenches. He wanted to walk about with his hands in his pockets, and indulge the excitement within him. Quickly he made his way to the summit of Y Ravine, and then strolled along a lofty track that led to the

peace of the Eski Line. Wasn't it strange that he couldn't feel fear, but only exultation? He had a presentiment—"an absolute presentiment"—that he would come through the attack alive; and that, this time next week, his fine deed would be done and himself be alive to enjoy its fame. He imagined his mother, Honor, and Peggy hearing of his success, and old Keatings making fun of it in France, and pompous old Derek bragging about it. He recalled the boys of Stratton Lye, scattered over all the war's fronts, and pictured them reading in their papers of an award to 2nd Lieut. A. O'Grogan and guessing that it was their old master. His fingers even felt the spot on his jacket where a ribbon would go; and in his mind's eye he saw the ribbon in place—the purple and white of the M.C., or perhaps the cardinal and blue of the D.S.O., or even the deep crimson—but no! this last was hoping too much. And he was quite ready to do without the ribbon, so the reputation was his! Yes: that was the truth; he could say it honestly.

Back on his traces. He was all aglow and must write to Honor. Moulden would be out of the way now, and he could be alone in his dug-out. His pace quickened, and he was almost running as he turned out of the Mule Trench into Leigh Ravine. Art Webster, a cigarette behind his ear, was washing Moulden's socks in front of a dug-out and greeted him with:

"Adjutant's Orderly come for you while you was away, sir."

"What? A message?"

"Yussir. Mr. Moulden said you was in the trenches, so e's gawn there."

"Do you know what it was about?"

"No, sir. Some order about this 'ere attack, I expect, sir. Not that we know anything abaht it, mind yer." And Art Webster winked as his master, Joe Wylie, might have done; but he could not wink with such an air as Joe Wylie.

"Did he say if it were urgent?"

"Yussir. You got to sign for it."

"Good! I'll go and find him."

Ah, didn't this suggest that his presentiment was already shaping into fact? Doubtless this order meant that he was to be given some particular task in the attack. His imagination could not surmise what that task might be, but he hurried towards it excitedly. He met the battalion runner in the

communication trench returning from his bootless visit to the Line. The man saluted and presented the message. With a hand that shook a little, Tony took it and read.

He read that 2nd Lieut. O'Grogan, C Company, was to leave the Peninsula at once and report to Lemnos for further instructions. He would be struck off the ration strength of the battalion as from to-morrow.

He nearly cried with anger and helplessness. His papers had dawdled along the Mediterranean, and dawdled back again, and chosen to arrive at this, of all hapless hours. It was a cruel, dastardly trick that Chance had played him. If he were to slip off the Peninsula now—oh, it defeated thought. To think what the Brigade would say, what the men of the 15th would say—damn! to think of it stayed the action of the heart. And of course! yes, of course! that blighter, that utter wrong 'un, Moulden, had picked up this news this morning at the Battalion Orderly Room. Probably he had swung his eavesdropping eyes over the papers on the Adjutant's table. Had he not mentioned Battalion Headquarters? Oh yes, he had known all about it when he spoke. Why, the man wasn't even clever in his double-faced dealing; a half-wit could see through it. And, my God! let him but begin to suggest—as he would for sure—that O'Grogan was leaving the Peninsula to escape the final disaster, and—but no, no, no! he mustn't have the chance; he mustn't have the chance!

Tony hurried to Colonel Tappiter and begged that the order might be countermanded. Useless. Orders were orders; and this order had trickled down to Gallipoli from God knew what eminence; the War Office itself probably.

Then would the Colonel always believe that he had not wanted to go; not now; not at such an hour as this.

Colonel Tappiter looked at the distressed young officer and nodded.

"Yes, O'Grogan. Dammit, yes. I think you made an idiot of yourself in taking any notice of that bloody-fool order about the Indian Army. What the hell's Mesopotamia compared with Gallipoli? One's a stroke of genius and the other's a—a—the other isn't. It's—it's second-rate stuff."

"But Gallipoli's a wash-out now, isn't it, sir?"

"Who the devil said so?" The Colonel heated at once, as if a favourite possession had been lightly touched. "Aren't we going to—no, I beg your pardon—that's secret."

"Do you mean the attack in a few days' time, sir? I've heard talk about it."

"Then you shouldn't have done. . . . Well, at least that means we're not going to quit."

"Does it, sir?" Tony could feel that the Colonel was defeating any black hints of evacuation by calling them white.

"Of course it does. *Quit?* No! As Hamilton said, it's unthinkable.

"But what can we do, sir, with so few men?"

"If we all believed in this show as it deserves to be believed in, and—er—and if we all knew for certain that the rotters at home were going to support us through thick and thin, by God we'd do it! The Turk has no real heart for fighting us. Anyone can see that. Let 'em give us another division or two, and we'd do it yet. And perhaps that's what they're up to."

"Oh, sir, I wish I could stay!"

"So do I. There's no spot like this. Let us have one more shot now, and if we can't get through because of all these millions of Germans, well, we can dig in, can't we, and stand a siege here? We'd hold 'em. It's December now, and in April we could attack 'em again. I've no use for being beaten after taking three knocks. It's not our usual style, either. They didn't ask the fellows to take the count at Mons, so why should they ask us to do it here? The men'll get up and go on—I'll answer for that! It's only the wind-bags at home who'll call the fight off. . . . Orderly! Tell Goodrich to come here. I'm going round the trenches."

He had forgotten Tony and his trouble.

So Tony spent the remainder of that day saying good-bye to his friends. Scrase and Hughes Anson no doubt believed his protestations of regret, but they said little beyond congratulating him on his escape and asking him to kiss their relations for them and tell them that they died bravely. "Tell 'em," said Hughes, "that you last saw us fighting 'one to three, with our faces to Achi Baba and our behinds to the sea'—will you tell 'em that?" Tony said he would. "Well, good-bye then, Bungay," Hughes concluded, "so sorry you can't stop, and thank you for calling." Scrase proffered no word of sadness at the loss of his friend; it was not in his nature to do so. He shook hands and said, "Good-bye, Bungay."

With officers of other companies, and other battalions in the Brigade, he was not sure how he stood. They chaffed him; but one or two of them, he imagined, were hiding their own thoughts behind their chaff; and he felt that his embarrassed, unasked explanations were sounding wordy and disingenuous.

Moulden was the only one who studied to be consolatory: "Now look here, O'Grogan, I know what you're thinking, and I know we haven't hit it off together as well as we might have done—really—but I should like to say this: if ever anybody suggests that you engineered your departure because you didn't like the look of things on the Peninsula, I shall tell 'em that they know nothing about you—see? I mean to say: put it like this: I shall tell 'em, if you don't mind, that you and I weren't exactly cousins in love with each other—really—but that's not to say I didn't admire your courage and all that—see? I know what you must be feeling. It's real bad luck—it is—honestly."

"Oh well, cut that out." Tony said it with a smile, though thinking the silence of the other officers preferable to the words of Moulden.

"That's right!" Moulden agreed. "But you understand what I mean, don't you?"

In the faces of his men when he bade them farewell there was no hint of unspoken censure. They were sincerely sorry to see the last of him, and that was all. But the censure would come, he knew. He had read the army well enough to know that a lying tale of his having abandoned his regiment in its hour of peril would first be whispered among the indolent officers of the Brigade and then would gain its currency and gradually percolate down to the men. It twisted his heart to think of Fred Roberts and Jim Stott and "Little Willie" Sparrow hearing such a murmur against him and haply believing it; or to picture Ernie Botten returning to Twineham after the war and carrying into its lanes and fields this rumour of Lieutenant O'Grogan's "cold feet." Oh, it was awful—sickening—to contemplate!

Fred Roberts and his young brother Dicky were the first of these men that he found in the trench bays. Not this time was Fred grumbling, but sitting on the fire-step and staring sadly and glumly out of those bewildered eyes of his—those "hospital eyes" which accepted all things but did not understand.

"I've got to leave you, Roberts," said he.

"Go on, sir!" Roberts was incredulous.

"Yes. I've been ordered to report at Mudros so as to be sent to India or somewhere."

"Go on, sir!" Then Roberts grinned. "You won't be wantin' a seckiterry, will yer, sir, 'cos if so, I'm ready. I'm jest about fed up with this place too, sir."

"'Fraid not, Roberts. . . . Besides *I'm* not fed up with it," added Tony, for the "too" had hurt him. "At least I am, I suppose: but I never wanted to go and leave you all."

Was there any sense in excusing himself like this, or was he only putting the seeds of an idea into the man's head?

"Well, the boys'll be real sorry, I guess, sir. They took to you, sir, if I may say so."

"Yes, I don't want to go," repeated Tony rather feebly. "Just as I was getting to know you all."

"No, sir."

"Well . . ." Dammit, what was one to say? "Good luck to you then."

"Thank you, sir. And to *you*, sir."

That was all with Fred Roberts. Next, Jim Stott.

"Good-bye, Jim."

The big fellow stared at Tony and at his outstretched hand.

"Art tha leaving us then, sir?"

"Yes."

"Why, it seems you only coom t'other week."

"Yes, yes, but I can't help it. I've got my orders to quit."

"Soom of us have all the luck, sir."

That stab at his heart again! Was the man hinting that—

"How do you mean?"

"Happen you've heard summat about this attack, sir?"

"Of course I have, and that's why I'm worried about leaving you all." No. Good old Jim Stott had meant nothing; the words had been innocent and humorous. "I'd rather be staying with the Battalion."

"Bah goom, *Ah* wouldn't, sir! Give me the chance to hook it and *Ah*'d be taking it all reet . . . eh, and oot th'army too and all—no mistake. *Ah* reckon nothing to soldiering as a way of spending me time, sir."

"But you don't do it too badly all the same, Jim."

"Well," Jim drawled apologetically, "*Ah*'m sweatin' on

getting me stripes, sir; that's all. Get a bit more pay that road, tha knows."

"Well, I hope you get them, Jim."

"Thank you, sir. And Ah hope they make you a colonel."

"And keep the Turk out of this trench after I've gone."

"Aye, sir, you bet! Kill me own blooming fayther if he coom into *this* trench."

"Good-bye, then."

"Good-bye, sir. I'll 'appen meet you again soomwhere."

And Ernie Botten. "Good-bye, Botten. Perhaps we shall see each other next at Twineham." Deep thought behind Ernie Botten's eyes as he examined this proposition. "Yes, zur, we might that." Then "Little Willie" Sparrow: and bout his sorrow there could be no dispute. "I'm off, Willie," said Tony; and Willie's instant reply was, "Oh *no*, sir!" A real pain rang in that "Oh *no*."

There yet remained Joe Wylie to be told, and certainly the ethics of departure didn't trouble him at all.

"Wylie," said Tony, "how would you like to leave the Peninsula to-night?"

"Gawd, sir! Wodjer say?"

"How would you like to leave the Peninsula to-night?"

Joe stared. "If you're pulling me leg, sir, Gawd forgive yer!"

"I've got to go to Lemnos, would you care to come too?"

Joe looked profoundly knowing. "*Would* I, sir? Would a bloater like a swim?"

"I think I can wangle it. You're getting on in years, aren't you?"

"Jest on fifty, sir; and never broken a plate."

"Well, they'll let you come, I expect."

Just then a machine-gun rattled crisply and some of its bullets whirred overhead. Joe turned towards the sound.

"Johnny's doing two hundred words a minute on that there typewriter of his. Yussir, *I'll* come along of you if I can—not 'arf I won't. This place's no longer safe. Are you leaving the Battalion for good, sir?"

"'Fraid so. Don't want to, but there it is. Unless"—a sudden idea had seized Tony—"I can get back to it."

The machine-gun rattled again; rattled more angrily, it seemed.

"Well, nah," said Joe, facing the Turkish army and addressing it, "that's torn it. That's put the lid on it. You've driven me away, Johnny, and I hope yer satisfied. And I don't

expect your father married your mother, neither. . . . Well, I guess I'll be packing the kit now, shell I, sir ? ”

“ Please.”

“ And me own, sir ? ” There was appeal in Wylie's tone.

“ I'll let you know.”

“ Gawd, sir, if you could wangle it. . . . ”

And that night, Tony, in his British Warm and with his pack on his back, climbed alone up the foot-track of Leigh Ravine ; for Joe Wylie had gone ahead with the heavy baggage. At the top, just before the track passed through a cutting into the Mule Trench, he turned round and looked back on the two infolding bluffs with their arc of beach below. The sigh of the sea drifted up to him (for the sea was murmuring there that night, as it had murmured during all the years before the British came, and would murmur for all years after ; as it is murmuring now). Behind him the Turks were firing in their desultory fashion, but with heavier stuff than usual ; and he remembered that he was looking down upon a doomed ravine. He was surprised that such an empty little place, patched only with scrub and holding neither house nor garden of man's construction, but only here and there a few holes called dug-outs, could hurt in the moment of farewell like a place beloved. He could hardly turn away from it. He tried to imagine it ten and twenty years on, and it seemed to him that all these ravines of Gallipoli, dropping from the uplands down to the sea, were not unlike the Norse gorges ; places very apt for heroic legends, such as the sagament old and the scalds.

He gave to Leigh Ravine his last look and turned and walked sadly along the Mule Trench till it dropped down a steep slope and opened on to that great canyon, the Gully Ravine. And here again he must turn round and say good-bye to the opening of the Mule Trench, which had led upwards to the firing line, and to danger, and to good friends.

Then on to Brigade Headquarters, down the Gully.

At V Beach he found Joe Wylie sitting on his heavy baggage ; and together they went for instructions to the *River Clyde*, where the M.L.O. had his headquarters. The Turkish gun, “ Asiatic Annie,” was shelling V Beach with “ coal-boxes ”

tossed from the other side of the Straits ; and two jagged holes in the bows of the *Clyde* and many large craters on the beach showed where her shells had bitten home. And the M.L.O. teased their impatience by doubting if they would get off that night. Tony was anxious to be gone ; and as for Joe Wylie, who could hardly believe in his good fortune, he kept up a laughing worry lest the plum so long desired should be drawn out of his reach by a sudden counter-ordering of his departure, or by his destruction under a shell from Asia or a bomb from the Taubes overhead.

They were passed to the M.L.O. on W Beach, who stated that he could get them on to the *Snaefell*, which was leaving No. 2 pier at eleven that night. So till then they hung about the hillside in the darkness. The darkness was full of movement. Many units were drawing their rations from the stores on W Beach ; and it was no happiness to Tony to watch the limbers drawn by the mounted English, the gharries driven by the squatting turbanned Indians, and the pack mules led by the silent Zionists, as they toiled through the ploughed and churned-up mud, away on to the table-land and out of hearing, going up to the men whom he had left.

It was not until after midnight that the *Snaefell*, with Tony and Joe Wylie aboard, drew away from the Peninsula. Why should such a movement clutch at a man's heart ? They were a little way at sea now, and the ravines and gorges of Gallipoli, enlarged by night, seemed to break from a forbidding height down to their gloom-filled coves. He watched the hurricane lanterns moving on the beaches, and the star-shells playing over the distant trenches ; and he thought of the patient men there staying out a campaign that drew near to dying. Under those star-shells were the lads of his platoon, and Scrase and Hughes Anson and the Colonel, still hoping, still waiting for the end, whatever it might be, as they had waited for long months, under the death that flew by night and the pestilence that walked in the noon-day. Now the lights could be hardly seen : they were pin-pricks in the distances of the dark. He clung to them desperately—but they were gone ; swallowed up by night and by time ; and Gallipoli was no more than memory could paint. And his memory painted it for him as his eyes had seen it last : a plateau ending in austere cliffs, where ravines and gorges broke down to the sea ; a place very apt for heroic tales, such as the sagamen told and the scalds.

CHAPTER X

IN AND OUT OF LEMNOS

ON a map the Island of Lemnos looks like a decayed old molar tooth, which, with its middle all eaten away, had become two teeth instead of one. And the cavity up the centre of the molar is all that the map can tell you of Lemnos' principal glory: its great "Lemnos Harbour"—or "Mudros Harbour," as we always knew it, because of the two villages on its either side, Mudros East and Mudros West, and of all that we suffered there. Mudros Harbour is one of the grand harbours of the world. It is a gulf of still sea, encircled by hills, of which some are low and rounded and others lofty and peaked. So deep is the enclosed water that there can anchor between its embracing hills gigantic liners for which Alexandria and Port Said will never cater. There are many cups in those hills; but as a bath is bigger than a cup, so much bigger is the depression that holds the Gulf of Mudros.

In the days of the Dardanelles Fight, if anyone had wanted to obtain in a single glance a conception of the vast and varied demands of the campaign, he should have shipped himself to Mudros Harbour. For the whole Merchant Service of Britain and half the Navy seemed to be anchored in the gulf, to say nothing of French warships, Italian warships, Greek vessels and tank-boats bringing water from Alexandria; and on all the hills around, like browsing sheep, were the white tents of rest camps and hospitals and stores, British, Australian, Indian and French. So full was the harbour of shipping that the water was fouled for bathers, unless they were game to swim through the off-scourings of the ships: but generally, in the summer heat, the tommies were more than game for this experience and added to the objects that littered the harbour their shouting shoals of naked men.

You went ashore ; and as you climbed the hill, treading in nothing but dust where, before the tramping of the thousand-footed armies, had once been fields of grain, you passed on your right a great canvas hospital. It was formed of long rows of square Indian-pattern tents, each of which was a ward containing six or eight cots. The rectangular area of the hospital was marked off by a border of big stones painted white ; and over all, on a tall mast and in the high Mudros wind, beat the Union Jack and the Red Cross.

Having passed the seaward front of this hospital, you reached a low hill's summit ; and here were four windmills whose bodies, built of local mud and stone, were shaped like round towers, and whose sails were laced to the framework of a large wheel. Since the armies came and trampled down the corn-fields, these mills had been idle ; two were falling into ruin, and one was occupied by an enterprising Greek as a " Hair Dressing Saloon for the Brave Armies of the Allies." Mills on this model were so much the outstanding feature of the bleak landscape, that to-day, if we close our eyes and try to recreate old Lemnos, we see always the heaving summits ridden by their round-towered, wheel-winged mills.

Standing by the hair-dressing saloon, and looking down the further slope, you saw another hospital, No. 1 Australian, arranged in similar lines ; and beyond this, a large French camp plentifully stocked with barrels of wine and supplied with a big bakery, from which arose the grateful smell of French loaves ; and behind the French settlement, rambling round the foot of the hill, the little village of Mudros East.

This Lemnos was a happy hunting-ground for insects. Flies battered on the sick men in the wards, centipedes climbed up the sides of the bell-tents, locusts leapt about the world outside, and the praying mantis prayed upon his bush and caught flies between his devotions. And ants : you could sit in your tent and watch a pair of ants with great bullet-heads and legs as long as spiders' contesting a point at issue, first by a round of fisticuffs and then by a wrestling bout, while others of the tribe were shop-lifting portions of the floor-matting and carrying them to their homes. And perky little lizards stared up at you and hoped you thought they were crocodiles.

In Lemnos the hills were the seats of the audience, and the water was the theatre of events. By the rapidity with which

the tidings, "The *Mauretania's* coming in," or "The *Aquitania's* anchored," overspread the camps and drew all men to their tent doors, you could plumb the monotony of the land. Little else was discussed: we knew all about the submarines which had threatened this particular vessel, and the skilful way she had evaded them; the number of troops aboard her and her final destination. And by our envy of those high officers who would go aboard her to-night and dine in her lavish saloon, you could plumb our weariness of the dusty Mudros meats. You should have been there that day when a murmur of admiration and amazement arose from the Mudros hills as the *Mauretania*, no longer a black transport, entered the harbour in the white paint and the green sash of a hospital ship. Oh, how lovely she was, and what—*what* did this change portend? Or you should have been there that evening when the old *Southland*, with a jagged hole in her bows, came limping into harbour at the pace of an old man's walk.

The news of her nearness had been conveyed to the hills by a racing rumour: "The *Southland* with twelve hundred Australians aboard has been torpedoed and is going down twenty miles from Lemnos." This ugly story was confirmed by a snort from a French destroyer which lit out of the harbour at thirty odd knots. The snort was a "halloo" to the other sea-hounds, who slipped their leashes and sped away on the scent sniffed up by the destroyer. They had gone to pick up the survivors. The harbour, you can be sure, waited to witness their return. Small rowing boats and gay Greek yachts were in big demand by the military, who desired to drift about the boom and give a cheer, when the time should come, to rescuers and rescued. First home and first to draw the cheers was the French destroyer, whose tiny decks were massed with Australian infantry. Then to the harbour and the hills was given the story of what had happened twenty miles out at sea. The torpedo, striking the *Southland*, blew a hole in her bows thirty foot long, killing in the explosion a small tale of men. She began to settle rapidly. The Australians, usually the most unruly army of dare-devils that ever enjoyed a war, this time tried perfect discipline for a change; and in the absence of all panic they were easily distributed into the lifeboats, which, taking to the sea, lay by to watch the *Southland* sink. But the Captain and the others who remained aboard decided that with a big effort they might yet force the old ship into harbour

and beach her somewhere and save her. Exulting in the decision, for a ship is a lovable thing, they called to the boats for volunteers who would accept the risks of her stoke-holds and see about getting her safely into port. Among the Australians hearing this there was a fight for precedence; and now at the time these details were being told to Lemnos the selected volunteers were stoking up below the water-line and forcing the vessel onwards at three miles an hour. Now the harbour was more excited to welcome the *Southland* herself than to watch the coming of the rescue ships. They waited and they waited—for three miles an hour is slow going. But the moment came when she rounded the islands at the mouth of the harbour, moving more slowly than the moon as it rises behind the hill; and she came on, dragging herself into safety; and there were some men watching who said afterwards that, although they had intended to cheer with the loudest, their throats were too full to do it, as they saw this splendid laggard, with the jagged wound in her bows, creeping into harbour at the pace of an old man's walk.

Lemnos had watched too, with wonderful feelings, the submarine E 11, after its impudent enterprises in the Sca of Marmora, come slipping in, like a shark's fin, a streak upon the water, with its crew unkempt and dishevelled upon its deck. These men were acknowledging the ovation given them by the crews paraded for that happy purpose on all the warships through which the submarine passed. Everyone knew that something out of the ordinary was happening in the harbour that afternoon when the E 11 came shyly within the boom.

And one early morning the *Snaefell* came into harbour, bringing Tony O'Grogan and Joe Wylie his batman. And the first thing they remarked, when the sunlight had come into harbour too, was the great number of hospital ships assembled, and the significant fact that they were all empty.

"Blimey, they don't half expect some casualties," said Joe. "I reckon we left the Peninsula at just abaht the right time, sir."

And on the good ship *Aragon*, where Tony reported as to his Headquarters, he found an "eve-of-the-battle" activity; there was an indefinable excitement in its offices

and alleyways ; and, as a result, the shortest measure for him. "No time to worry about you," was the tone that met him. "More important things on hand. Go to a rest camp and wait."

So ashore went Tony and Joe to a rest camp, where they had nothing to do for days except to wander over the island and gather rumours about the movements on the Peninsula. Strolling along the lines of the hospitals, Tony observed that all their wards, as far as possible, were empty. On a level floor between the hills he came upon a newly-erected camp of bell-tents, and they stood there, *empty*. Flapping in the wind, they waited.

It was on a Saturday night that the smaller of the troopships went out, and some warships with them ; and in the morning some of the hospital ships followed. . . . And all that day the murmur of heavy guns on Gallipoli troubled the Lemnos air. By night the truth was out ; the whole of the army at Suvla and Anzac had been drawn off the Peninsula, while the army at Helles had attacked all along its line, to hold the Turks in front of it. In the wake of this news came the Suvla army itself in trawlers and destroyers and barges ; and the waiting camps received it. Astonishingly few casualties came in the hospital ships and they were nearly all from Helles. Apparently the Suvla-Anzac evacuation had taken the enemy by surprise, and been concluded to its last man before the Turks bestirred themselves to worry it.

But Helles ? What of Helles now ? What would happen there ? The Helles army couldn't be brought in off this easy style, now that the all-important element of surprise had gone. Kit Scrase . . . Rosy Hughes . . . Quickshaw . . . were they still alive ? And all the boys of Tony's Company ; how many of them were going underground this morning ? Oh damn and damn and damn ! To think that he had slipped away just before a battle ! And just before Helles became the most dangerous spot in the world ; for such it was now, when all the Turkish regiments and guns which had held the Suvla-Anzac lines were moving southward to their task of destroying the British who were still ashore. Ah, wait ! if of his own free will he were to go back to his regiment at once while the threat of destruction was still over it, he would prove that it was not funk which had scuttled him off to Lemnos. Yes, that was it ; that was what he must do, he must get back at

once. But the *Aragon* said "No!" It was a curt "No," and heavy with a secret; it sounded rather like, "By God, no! We don't want to send any more men to Helles for the Turks to imprison or slaughter." No, let Lieutenant O'Grogan go back to his rest camp and await further orders.

So Tony stayed in his tent, not sulking like Achilles, for his outward fashion, as with all in those days who had secret pains to cover, was merriment; but the worm was eating at his heart. There was little that was noble in his anxiety, as he perfectly well perceived; it was less an eagerness to die with his friends (though this heroic spice was not entirely missing) than a boy's fear of being thought a coward and of being spoken of unkindly behind his back. Tony, who had imagined that in the war he would escape his excessive "personalness," was now feeling about as personal as ever in his life.

With this for his mood he was standing one forenoon near the Red Cross stores piled by the Egyptian Pier, when whom should he descry among them but Padre Quickshaw? The padre, looking not a bit more like a chaplain than usual, was pointing out to a Red Cross civilian—and doing it rather pettishly—such stores as he desired for himself and certainly intended to have. Tony ran towards him, thirsty for news, and loudly hailed him: "What ho, padre! Padre dear! What the deuce are you doing *here*?"

Quickshaw, glancing up, gave him that incipient grin which was all that ever got past the settled resentment in his eyes and on his mouth; and explained that since it looked as if they were going to stay for ever on Helles, he had come in search of whisky and marmalade for the Brigadier and—what was vastly more important, to his thinking—Christmas comforts for the men.

"Splendid!" exclaimed Tony, and walked him back for lunch at the rest camp; and while the meal delayed its approach, he sat him in his tent and plied him with questions. How had the Royal West Essex fared in the attack, and what had it all been about?

Oh, the attack at Helles was to cover the evacuation of Suvla, of course. It had been launched on December 19th, just before the Suvla army did a guy.

And how was everybody after it?

Well, Scrase and Moulden and the rest were all right, and

Hughes Anson had only a flesh wound, but eighteen men of C Company had been killed, including two of Tony's own platoon.

"Not——?"

"No, none of your pets," said Quickshaw, rather contemptuously. "Willie Sparrow and Art Webster weren't in the fight; of course—being batmen; and as for Jim Stott, he's by way of being a battalion hero just now. He's got his corporal's stripes. They say—but I don't know what truth's in it: probably not much—that his rifle was knocked out of his hands early in the attack, so he seized a Turkish officer round the belly and enjoyed a wrestling match with him, talking to him in broad Lancashire and saying, 'Eh, lad, boot Ah'm not taking any back-chat from thee, tha knows.'"

"And Ernie Botten?" inquired Tony.

"Oh, Ernie, he lumbered across No-Man's Land as casually as if he were driving a Twineham cow to market, and finding no one in the opposite trench, sat there and picked his teeth until someone should explain things to him."

"And what about Fred Roberts and young Dicky?"

"Oh, Fred stopped something," Quickshaw remembered.

"Yes, Fred stopped a chunk of shell in the bombardment."

"Not killed?" asked Tony anxiously.

"Lor' bless you, no. They took the chunk out of him at No. 17 Stationary and he's got it by the side of his bed at this moment. I saw him in hospital—he's just the same as ever; he insisted that his wound was nothing and didn't hurt at all, and proceeded to grumble like hell because some orderly had lost the boots he'd had all through the war and was trying to foist a new pair on to him."

"And, padre, have they—has there been any talk in the Brigade about my going away?"

This question averted Quickshaw's face in a manner that made Tony's heart beat quick with fear.

"*Has* there been any, then, padre? Oh, tell me; please tell me."

Quickshaw told him the truth with his usual out-spokenness. Yes, there had been a deal of comment, and mostly unfavourable; it was all too stupid for words, of course, but there you were: decent fellows like Scrase and Anson might maintain that nothing but bad luck had timed O'Grogan's departure for the worst possible moment, but if people didn't

want to believe a thing, they wouldn't believe it; they just asked, "Why the devil did O'Grogan apply in the first place for a transfer if it wasn't that he didn't like the look of things on Gallipoli——"

"Oh, it's a lie!" interrupted Tony, almost with tears in his voice. "They know I didn't go for that reason, whatever I may have said!"

"Of course you didn't," agreed Quickshaw, adding with a grin, "You did it to relieve Kut or something, didn't you?"

"Yes, and when there seemed to be nothing happening on the Peninsula. And they all said themselves it was a sound thing to do."

"They say a lot of things they don't mean."

"Yes. . . ." Tony walked up and down with his thoughts, and suddenly continued: "And I was a blasted fool to hide my real reason under a lot of talk about being fed up with Gallipoli. They expect you to talk that kind of stuff, but only so long as you're not acting on it."

"That's it!" nodded Quickshaw with some enthusiasm. "That's them exactly! They talk cynicism, but they don't expect you to *be* cynical."

"No . . . but . . . but why can't they see that it wasn't any fault of mine that my orders came through at such a vile moment?"

"Bah!" scoffed Quickshaw. "Most of them don't know any details. They simply hear it whispered that you went while the going was good, and they believe it and pass it on, like the sheep they are. It makes a good story."

Tony nodded bitterly. He sat down on a box and rested his elbows on his knees. Restless, he rose up again. "Tell me: have the men heard this yarn?"

"Yes, of course they have." Quickshaw said it almost cheerfully.

"Oh, Christ!" Tony moaned.

"But, for your comfort, there are one or two who won't listen to it. Jim Stott for instance. He said to me, 'Ah reckon Ah know when an officer's got t'breeze oop and when he hasn't, and if anyone tells me that Mr. O'Grogan ever had cold feet, I say he's a liar and that's that.' You've a champion in Jim Stott. He's got an ounce more brains than most."

"Good old Jim!" murmured Tony; but it wounded him

to think that the men were even debating such a topic ; and he walked miserably to and fro before asking, " And tell me another thing : is Moulden anywhere in this picture ? "

" Oh, *that* man ! " said Quickshaw, with a finality of contempt which was in magnificent discord with his Christian calling. " He's a worm. "

" Yes ; but has he been saying anything ? "

" Of course he has. What do you expect ? "

" By gosh ! " swore Tony, " if I meet him again—— "

" Yes, and he does it in a particularly slimy way, " continued Quickshaw cheerfully. " He first tells people what's being said, and then says that, in his opinion, it's not *wholly* fair. There's a world of poison in that ' wholly. ' "

" Oh, my God ! Don't tell me any more ! " begged Tony. " I never felt quite so like killing anyone in all my life. "

" I shouldn't worry, " Quickshaw comforted him. " You're going to India, and we'll probably go to France—if we ever get off Gallipoli alive—so there'll be half a world between us. "

" What I should like to do, " said Tony, his fist closing at his side, " would be to get back to the battalion, and then I'd show them if I'm a funk or not ; and when I'd got the bloody V.C., I'd shove it down Moulden's throat. "

" He's not worth worrying about. "

" I know he's not, " Tony admitted, sitting down again. " But there it is ! The things that aren't worth worrying about are always the things that worry you to death. . . . Padre, you'll do your best to scotch his dirty lie for me, won't you ? You'll tell them that I've been moving heaven and earth, trying to get back to them—— "

" Of course I will, " said Quickshaw ; " but it won't do any good. " His comfort was always of an exceedingly limited nature.

But Quickshaw did not get back to the Peninsula—at least not for many days ; there was too much urgent trafficking along the line of communication between Mudros and Helles ; and all the time, so thought the impatient Tony, the roots of this ugly little tale about himself must be thickening, and its branches creeping. Quickshaw, by way of consolation,

suggested that everyone would now be saying that *he* was scrimshanking too; and that for his part he didn't care whether they said it or not; *he* wasn't going to break his heart about the talk of a lot of tenth-rate minds. Which was all of little comfort to Tony, since the indurations of another man's heart didn't alter the tender places of his own.

Indurations? One may wonder, for Quickshaw shared Tony's tent in these days, and thus a hidden side of him was revealed to a friend. Tony saw him at night kneeling for a very long while by the side of his camp bed, with his face buried in his hands. He saw also that, under the faded khaki shirt, he wore on a soiled cord a tiny crucifix against his breast.

For three days Quickshaw fumed around his castle of stores where it stood awaiting transport; and then abandoned it with an oath, muttering, "Well, let them rot there. *I'm* not going to spend all day sitting on my behind on a lot of muck for the Brigadier's belly." And he turned his attention to various jobs on Mudros East, which, so he said, might very well have been done sooner if anyone had the brains to think of them. There was first the job of bringing the Red Cross comforts which were idling by the shore into useful contact with the sick and wounded who were lying unutterably bored in the hospital tents. Apparently there were no other chaplains in the immediate neighbourhood to do this job, dysentery, jaundice and other Lemnos plagues having swept the district clean of them; so Quickshaw, who was never once sick throughout the whole Gallipoli campaign, or, if he was, never showed it, proceeded to do their work for them, after ventilating his wonder that such weaklings had ever quitted the hot-water bottles and bed-socks of their English vicarages. (Wherein, of course, he was grossly unfair to some quite good fellows; but then Quickshaw was often unfair.)

Among the Red Cross comforts there were gramophones and gramophone records, and Quickshaw soon had all of these turned out of their billets, "fallen in," and detailed to the various wards, where he would inspect them and see that their noses were kept to the grinding stone—while he distributed among their listeners his packets of Wild Woodbines and tins of sticky sweets (also provided by the Red Cross Society, which had so much to answer for when the day of reckoning came). These painful comforts disinterred by Quickshaw were one and all those ventriloquial instruments

which, instead of trumpeting their noise through great tin throats, opened doors in their wooden stomachs and let out the cacophony that way. And in 1915, the Gallipoli year, if there was one form of gramophone more inexcusable than others, it was the one that talked through its stomach. Because you couldn't properly hear what it had to say. And if you had to hear the damn thing at all, you'd as lief have heard it well.

Easily the most popular tune rendered by this shocking team of gramophones was the "Song of the Rag-picker." So far as this gentleman's words were audible, he appeared to be stating that he was "a rag-picker, a rag-picker, a rag-time-picking man" and that "most anytime of the day, you could hear him picking away, for he was a rag-picker, a rag-picker, a rag-time-picking man."

It was true enough. Somewhere among the dysenteries and enterics, the jaundiced or the para-typhoids, in the bivouacs of the Indians, or even in a bell-tent of sick Turkish prisoners, you could hear him picking away.

Now with the exception of the C.O. of one of the hospitals (who, whensoever the Rag-picker obliged in the distance, produced a piccolo from his pocket and accompanied him in his efforts), the Medical Officers, the Quartermasters and the finer-calibred N.C.O.s wished the Rag-picker to Jericho. It was all very well, they argued, for Padre Quickshaw to set the Rag-picker going for the sick and convalescent, who were only dwelling for a few days in the hospitals and, at the worst, wouldn't hear him more than four-score times; but it was a hard case for those whose permanent work lay in the camps. And the matter was made worse when the convalescents took to roaring the Rag-picker's little refrain in chorus, even when the gramophones were silent. And the very victims who grumbled most heartily at the vogue of the jingle would be detected whistling its catchy bars. Shamefacedly they would maintain that the abominable ditty was so running in their heads that willy-nilly they must whistle it. "One day," they said threateningly, to prove that their attitude was still sound, "there'll be an accident to that record. The Rag-picker'll find his voice cracked."

His voice did crack: it cracked right from the centre to the circumference. But most people believed that the breaking was innocently done. All the more did they think so, when

they saw some who had been loudest in their exultation over the fracture seeking to repair it and enable the Rag-picker to sing once more. And they succeeded. After a little treatment he took to the boards again, and sang with a *bic* in his speech at regular intervals :

“ Most any *bic* of the day
You can *bic* him picking away. . . . ”

We have heard him since in other lands than Lemnos, but like a strolling player who carries his scenery with him, he brings a dim reproduction of hills and mills and harbour, and spreads it about him where he sings.

One late afternoon, when Christmas was drawing very near, Quickshaw was standing beside Tony, looking towards the Egyptian Pier.

“ Good gracious, O’Grogan,” he said indignantly. “ What’s this little lot coming up ? ”

As a rule the only arrivals from this jetty, nowadays, were the mournful processions of dilapidated wounded and sick who, bandaged and ticketed, poured into the hospitals in two or three shifts a day. But here, this afternoon, men were approaching, spick and span in their naval uniforms, and carrying black leather bags of uncouth shapes and music-stands. Occasionally from their midst there flashed, in the falling sun, the polished metal of their instruments.

“ It’s a band from one of the warships,” Quickshaw suggested.

The leader of the band, approaching the padre, and mistaking him in his careless attire for some R.A.M.C. orderly, inquired : “ Hey, chum, where do you keep this ’ere sky-pilot? He sent for us, yer see, jest to sort of cheer up the bloody sick.”

“ It’s me,” said Quickshaw.

The man apologized, and asked to be shown a good site where “ his lads ” could give a brief performance. He seemed rather ashamed of being ashore at all.

Quickshaw escorted them to the space on the low summit between the wheel-winged mills, where, having an Australian hospital on one side of them and an Imperial hospital on the other, they could entertain both at the same time. And here a large crowd of convalescents, attracted by the smart uniforms and the shining instruments, quickly formed an outer circle ; the musicians with their music-stands formed an inner circle ;

and the conductor stepped into the middle and formed the bull's-eye. He tapped his stand with his baton, looked around and inquired with his eyes but not with his tongue if all was ready, then poised the baton in the air and framed with his lips the words, "One—Two—Three." The band struck up with nothing more appropriate than "Put me amongst the girls."

Tony watched the crowd; a crowd, remember, made up of exiles marooned one Christmastide many years ago on a bleak island; and of some of the sickest and weariest of them all. He felt its pulse, as it were, to test the effect of the music. There were witticisms, of course; but only a few; as a whole it was a ring of silent men who gazed like wondering children at the polished brass of the instruments and the immense activity of the big drummer; and their eyes were wistful like the eyes of ruminant animals. When a flimsy waltz succeeded the last tune, the humorists clasped each other's waists and danced round the mill, but the men of the great wistful majority remained where they stood, with their hands in their pockets. And on the completion of the waltz they only accorded their applause as a dreamy afterthought.

Then the leader of the band produced a large tin containing Wild Woodbines and boxes of matches. Lest anyone should suspect him of generosity, he said in a casual tone which suggested that he only wanted to get rid of the worrying stuff:

"Here, have some of these fags, you fellows."

In their sickness and war-weariness the tommies could be selfish enough at such times, and there was a rush and a scramble for the coveted cigarettes, during which music-stands were overturned and the musicians, who had clubbed together to buy the gifts, blew spittle out of their instruments to conceal their satisfied smiles.

And after the outer circle had been reformed, and the overturned music-stands picked up, and the musicians' mouths wiped, the band did an outrageous thing. It was unpardonable, and Tony gathered from the truncated grin on Quickshaw's face that he had put them up to doing it. They played a certain tune which was greeted with groans, laughter and applause, till at last all sounds merged into its monstrous chorus of:

"He's a rag-picker, a rag-picker,
A rag-time-picking man."

There were bales of hymn-sheets in those Red Cross comforts ; and well—us Mudros lads (as we sometimes called ourselves) were soon rolling up in fine numbers to Padre Quickshaw's evening services. These services were held just before sundown each evening on the space between the mills. Mind you, we were not saints, although there were some very pious fellows among us who were to be regularly found sitting on the mills' stone steps, actually *before* the service was advertised to start. But most of us were no better than we ought to have been and swore far more than was good for us ; still, we rolled up all right to Mr. Quickshaw's evening service. Some of us came because we were merely curious, and there was not much harm in that ; some because we were deadly dull and welcomed any relief from the monotony of the island, and again there was not much harm in that ; and some because we liked to hear our voices in hymns, and who shall say there was much harm in that ?

These were snowball services. They began with a dozen pillars of the church sitting down at the fall of the day beneath the mill and singing a hymn. The rest of us were shy creatures and waited till proceedings had further developed. Three more hymns, chosen by vote, followed, during which we strayed up. We didn't much care in what dress we came. We strolled out of the Convalescent Wards in pyjamas and overcoats ; we sauntered up in bandages and splints ; we were wheeled up in invalid chairs ; or we lamely limped, supported by a sound-legged comrade. When we were huge Australians we often wandered into the congregation with an air that said, "We are not committing ourselves to any conclusion by joining this crowd, but we don't mind taking a hymn-sheet and listening to what you've got to say."

So whatever we were, we strolled up, flopped down into any position on the ground, and, having thrown away our cigarettes, or knocked out our pipes (because, after all, we were at church), we joined in the hymns. That is to say, we did this unless we were Indians, when we sat on our heels at a little distance and watched the passage of events. Once, by the way, we were a brown Maori, who came right into the middle of the choir, being not a little proud of our Christianity.

At the fifth hymn, in response to a suggestion from the chaplain, we rose to our feet and discovered that we were a big international ring of sick men and hale, bloodless and

bronzed, all holding torn and soiled hymn-sheets in our hands. The khaki parson, who knew nothing about music, was in the middle conducting. He did most eccentric things, stopping the hymns half-way through and saying, "We'll sing the next verse softly, please, and in the following verse, let the sound swell out as much as possible;" all of which we were most willing to do, for we were sentimental persons and liked dramatic effects in our singing.

Generally the singing of our great male-voice choir was good to hear. There were amongst us many singers, trained and sweet-voiced, who improvised our harmonies. Orderlies on duty in the hospital lines came to their porches and stood there listening. There would be extraordinary quiet within the wards, where the men, lying in their beds, liked to listen undisturbed, when the familiar tunes came through the doorways, along with the gathering darkness. The Medical Officers (who never go to church) reclined in their hammock chairs at the outside of their tents, smoked, and gave themselves up to the enjoyment of the Lemnos evening, which was usually still and lovely, and of the distant chorus.

The padre never allowed us to forget the Navy, which had chaperoned us so jealously in the Gallipoli Ball, from its first dance to closing time; so we always ended our service with "Eternal Father, strong to save": we got to know it by heart, and for some of us its Mudros memories will haunt it for evermore. We sang it with our hands at our sides as, a minute later, we would sing "The King"; because by this time the darkness had deepened and the use of our hymn-sheets was impossible. For you must remember, if you would like this picture complete, that our service began just before sundown, and, quite early in its course, a golden sun began to drop behind a sweep of violet hills.

Sunset was the only lovely thing on Lemnos Island; and for how many does the name "Lemnos" remain the best-hated name in the war? The old Peninsula, compared with dull-hilled Lemnos, was a lovable place. Perhaps this was because in the Mudros camps we enjoyed all the plagues of the Peninsula, but none of its excitements; perhaps our morbid hatred was subconsciously rooted in the bitter contrast we

drew between the high feeding and good drinking on the ships, and the wretched feeding and contaminated drinking ashore. The hatred, as always, was expressed less malignantly than humorously. In his darkest ennui 2nd Lieut. O'Grogan would say, "Mudros may not have been the last place God made, but it was certainly one of the last," and Padre Quickshaw would answer him, "Yes, it's not one of His successes."

The ennui had a tongue like an ant-eater, reaching out to any and every rumour. Joe Wylie treated his "boss" to a new rumour each morning when he called him; and to another at sunset; and one day he brought a story that was striking indeed. Christmas was forgotten now; the urgent traffic between Mudros and Helles had quieted; Quickshaw was gone, having abandoned his stores and hurried back to the Peninsula for fear of what was afoot there; and the year 1915 was within a day of its end—God speed it into the past and into history, for it was full of a big tragedy!—and Joe came shouting:

"They're coming awf, sir. They're coming awf at once!"

"Who?" asked Tony.

"The boys on Helles, sir. Some's awf already."

"Do you mean we're going to evacuate Helles?"

"Yussir. I seen the Lancashires. They come awf last night and they're over the water there, at Sarpi."

"But how on earth can we evacuate a second time? Johnny must be up to the game now?"

"Well, it's like this here, sir. They do it like this, sir." Confidentially—but most excitedly—he took his rifle and laid it on some boxes at the tent door. "They're up to all manner o' tricks. Nah, then; there's your rifle on the parapet pointing at Johnny Turk." He picked up an empty cigarette-tin (fifty Gold Flake). "You tie this 'ere empty tin to a lever connected with the trigger. Got that, sir? Well, then you take this one"—he picked up an empty condensed-milk tin—"you pierce a little hole in its bottom, and you fixes it right over the empty one—so. Then you fill it with water, and the water drips ever so slowly into the empty tin underneath—it may take a *bower*, sir—and when the bottom tin is filled up to a certain weight, dahn it goes and pulls the trigger, and, gaw! the bloody rifle fires—excuse me, sir—the rifle fires, and there ain't no one near it! Nah! the fellow what owned it is down on W beach by that time getting into a lighter."

Joe was so pleased with his mental picture of the fellow

doubling down the Gully Ravine towards a lighter that he kept the back of his hand under his long nose and over his smile for quite a time.

"Damned ingenious," Tony acknowledged.

"Yussir." Joe smoothed down both wings of his moustache.

"Or you could work it by filling the top tin with sand."

"You could, Wylie?"

"Yussir. And look here, sir, you can do the same trick with a candle and a bit o' string. When the candle burns down as far as the string, it breaks it and lets go some gadget, and your machine-gun starts firing. Gaw! 'tain't 'arf smart——"

"When did you hear this?"

"—and jest a minute, sir! Don't yer see that, with these contraptions fixed all along the fire trenches, you can keep the front line spittin' and cussin' when the boys that manned it have long ago done a guy and are half way to Lemnos?"

"Where did you get this tale from?"

"Law bless yer, sir; everyone knows it. Known it fer some time. Our Essex boys are comin' awf in abaht two days."

"Are they? Great Scott!"

"Yurse, sir; and the last lot's comin' awf on January the eighth. They'll set these 'ere gadgets going in the firing line and trapes dahn to the beaches—oh, ever so quietly—and the Navy'll be ready for 'em with its pinnaces and lighters and destroyers."

"Dear old Father and Mother come to fetch them!" laughed Tony.

"Yussir. Home from the party."

Was it all true? Possibly, because night after night, from now onward, the little boats were bringing troops from Helles and decanting them into the hutments and the tents on the Sarpi side; and one January day Tony looked across the water and knew that he was looking at the tents of the Royal West Essex Brigade. Over there were Colonel Tappiter and Scrase and Hughes Anson; and the officers of the sister battalions. Over there were Corporal Jim Stott and "Little Willie" Sparrow, Art Webster and Ernie Botten.

He was seized with a fear of them; of officers and of men. Oh no, he wouldn't go over on a visit; he couldn't face the cold looks of some and the false uncomfortable geniality of others. Go over and explain the sickening tale again? No!

Disputing a lie—talking about it and about—only manured its roots. Oh, if only his “further orders” would come quickly and waft him thousands of miles away from the scene of his blunder! It made him feel a sneak to be skulking on this side of the harbour when his old brigade was yonder at Sarpi. . . . And by gosh! if he were sent to Mesopotamia, he would perform there some tremendously heroic act which would echo round the world and make his traducers look foolish indeed.

So went Tony’s little conflict against the background of one far greater. Whether or not the Turks were alive to the plotting on Cape Helles, all Mudros suspected the truth, and watched, and waited. By the night of January the seventh Mudros told Mudros that only the covering troops were still under Achi Baba, and the hazardous task of drawing them off would be attempted the next day. January the eighth; this had been the anxious date all along. And January the eighth: here it was, bright over Mudros. Oh, thank God it was a friendly day with a clear sky and a slight sea.

All that day Mudros waited; speaking only of the one topic; giving a cheer to any ship that went out of the harbour; listening to the throb of guns in the north-east. Not much louder to-day than usual, that throb. Was the Turk still unawake, or was he just indifferent? If the guns attained a drum-fire density, it would mean that terrible things were happening to the stout fellows who had covered the retreat. But all day long the throb was no more than that regular heart-beat which, during its eight months of life, had been the pulse of the Gallipoli fight. There was no acceleration as of a heart excited. The weather stayed fair; which was good, because if the wind were to rise and the seas mount high—what then? Aye, what then? Those who had seen the Gallipoli beaches in storm shook their heads in despair of an answer.

With the darkness the wind *did* rise: it curveted about the camps; it crinkled the harbour water, and flapped the bell-tents; and each time the poles strained and creaked the officers turned their anxious faces to one another and grimaced. Like the wind, rumours rushed abroad all night, visiting the mess tables and the tents, and circling round the camps: the men on Helles were all scuppered, said one; they were all off, said another; a German submarine was sinking the ships as fast as they tried to get away, said a third; and, strongest

tale of all, there was a great battle in progress, and reinforcements would be hurried from Lemnos ; one had better stand by.

But the night, if windy, was quiet ; there was no noise of a great battle. And more rumours came, and more rumours. But no troops yet ; no destroyers or trawlers or old Isle of Man packets entering the harbour heavy with men. Tony, forgetful of his own trouble, and more excited about this than ever he had been in the old days about an international match, arranged an all-night sitting in his tent. He and a few others waited there for news, keeping silence more often than speaking. They smoked away the hours ; and at midnight the first whiff of certain news drifted up to them. A destroyer, crowded as a corn bin, had come into the harbour amid cheers ; and its story, such as it was, had floated ashore : the Turks, said the destroyer, had been quiet enough when it left ; but it was early then—only eight o'clock—and it couldn't say what had happened since. During the next hours there came more boats with more men ; and all reported the same quietness on Helles : the Turk was asleep, or he was deluded, or he was glad to see them go. Tony's guests succumbed and went off yawning, but not he ; he knew he would not sleep till he had heard the final result, so, still in his clothes, he got under a blanket and lay there smoking.

And at some moment in the small hours there was a sound of a huge explosion away in the north-east.

He started up and listened ; then threw off his blanket and went out of his tent door and stood in the windy night, listening. If he were right, this meant that the last boys were clear of the Peninsula, and the charges were exploding under the abandoned ammunition and stores. Another explosion ; and he could have let loose an hurrah, there on the empty hillside ! He wanted to rush into tents and wake people up, to tell them what was happening. There came a noise of cheering over the water. . . .

In these distant detonations, then, the story of Gallipoli had closed. It was over. So strange : yesterday Gallipoli was a real thing in the world ; this morning—for it was morning now—it was only a thought ! A gauze had fallen and shut it off amongst past things. With every minute, as he stood here, it was retreating further into the past, its details misting out. With every month and every year it would give up more

and more of its outline ; and memories which had known it once would doubt if they were seeing it aright. Very strange and wonderful, if you thought about it, that a single second of time could transfigure a reality, vast and rather terrible, into an insubstantial thought, and give it the beauty and sadness of a thing remembered.

CHAPTER XI

THE SHIP OF DEFEAT

THE ships for the evacuation of Lemnos were in the bay. Big liners and little liners, swinging round to the wind, and empty. One loaded up and bore out majestically; and a camp of tents dropped on the Sarpi side, leaving a hill-slope bare. Another followed; and over there at Sarpi the tents which had housed the Lancashires were seen no more: where they had been there was only a field ready for a Greek to plough. Two mornings later Tony saw that all the tents of the Royal West Essex had been struck; and he knew that his old brigade must be embarking to-day. To-day the far side of Lemnos, except for a few hutments, was looking as it must have looked in the peace of July, 1914.

What about his own position? Everyone seemed to have forgotten him, who was now no more than a rationed guest of the Mediterranean Expeditionary Force. He'd go aboard the *Aragon* and remind the powers of his existence. On the *Aragon* he realized that they were far too busy emptying Lemnos to give attention to him: no one could find his dossier of papers. A staff officer said, "I seem to remember something about you. We communicated with Alex., but they've probably forgotten to do anything in all this chemozzle. However, I'll make a note about you."

The next morning a telegram came to the rest camp ordering 2nd Lieutenant O'Grogan to rejoin the 15th Royal West Essex on board H.M.T. *Empress of Britain* before 16.00 that day.

Rejoin the 15th! Oh, no, not *that*! . . . Pah! but it was almost laughable! He could see what had happened. The whirlpool of the Gallipoli Evacuation had bobbed him about in pretty fashion. Hardly had he been drawn from his unit before it had filled the scene and drifted him out of its way; then its turmoil had ended by sinking his papers or tossing

them into a limbo; and lastly, the complete change which it had wrought in the pattern of the war had demanded his return to his unit, at least till the whole world-strategy of the British Empire should have been reconsidered. In its magnificent unconcern for the individual, its effect on one tiny speck had been to make him abandon his regiment just when danger loomed and to come humbly back to it when danger was overpast.

Late the previous night a driving rain had begun to beat down upon the rest camp and threaten destruction to the standing canvas. All night it had driven by, and its power was not waning now. Tony called Joe Wylie and bade him pack. In these vile conditions, with the tent thudding its resentment above them, they hustled everything into valise and kit-bag, and sent the luggage out into the merciless day. Wearing a British Warm, and a Burberry over it, and a mackintosh cape over the Burberry, Tony dragged heavily down to the Egyptian Pier, where, having been thoroughly flogged by the rain and shaken by the wind, he sat down to get soaked upon his soaking baggage. The rain increased in fury. The plains upon which some of the Divisional camps had been placed were now a wild waste of mud flats and coffee-coloured lagoons. Such was his last close-up of the Mudros land.

A trawler, aptly named *The Flying Mist*, took him and Joe Wylie aboard, where they packed themselves among a concentration of saturated soldiery. She put out into the mists of the rain-whipped harbour, and passed under the 40,000 tons of ship that composed the towering hull of the *Olympic*; and headed, as the rain stiffened into hail, for the mouth of the harbour and the *Empress of Britain*, which was lying in the roads at anchor.

Tony felt like a nervous schoolboy returning to his classmates after a suspension in disgrace. He felt ashamed as they came under the lee of the *Empress* and he saw some of the men of the battalion gazing down at the trawler. Aboard, he walked hurriedly past officers who had turned as they recognized him. He went straight to Colonel Tappiter's cabin and poured out his tale, while his overcoat and mackintoshes poured rain on the floor.

The Colonel was sympathetic till he suddenly remembered that sympathy with a soldier was contrary to his creed, and said, "Dammit, O'Grogan! Doesn't it show you what I've

always said—that the individual is of absolutely no bloody importance? What the devil! aren't you doing what I've always told you's fatal"—he paused while he wondered what the devil it was that he was always pronouncing fatal—"aren't you setting up your own potty little happiness against the—er—against the needs of the show? If the show wants to make fools of us, it's got to do it, I suppose. I mean, I'd be fed up about this abandonment of Gallipoli if I thought I was of any importance at all, but since I'm not, I'll do what they tell me. Yes. . . . Well, I'm glad to have you back. . . . Good-bye."

It was a reasonable attitude, no doubt, and Tony thought that perhaps he would try to adopt it—but not, by Jove, till he had enjoyed a brief controversy with Moulden. But oh, where was Kit Scrase? Where Hughes Anson?

Scrase he found at last in the Smoking-room; and he had no sooner seen him than he decided not to worry him with his own troubles.

For there was a remarkable, a disturbing change in Scrase. Kit appeared ten years older than when Tony said good-bye to him in Leigh Ravine one month ago. His cheeks had paled and sunk; his eyes had retreated into shadowed sockets; parallel lines had graved themselves across his brows; a nervous agitation shook his hands ever and anon; and a stuttering aphasia would sometimes impede his speech. He looked mind-sick; thought-harried; as if, like a bailiff, some secret fear was setting as master in his heart. He met Tony with lightsome words enough, but they hid nothing. Oh my pity, what had happened to Kit during those last days on Gallipoli?

The Roseate Hughes was the same as ever—red, plump, Dartmoor-cropped, laughing. "Oh yes," he said, with his wonted ruthlessness, "the idea's all over the shop that you quitted the battalion in its hour of need. Sorry to say so but it's the truth. I've done my best for you, Bungay, trying to stamp it out, but it's not been any good. It's so damn difficult: if you deny a scandal too much, you only set people talking about it. I may say *en passant* that my denials were very powerfully phrased. If I've told one bloke that he's a liar and a lunatic, I must have told it to a hundred, I'm afraid." Perceiving the distress in O'Grogan's face, he shook his head, lifted his shoulders and smiled. "I'm afraid there's nothing to do, old Tono, but to live it down."

Driving back the tears in his throat, Tony asked about Scrase. Hughes could explain nothing. Kit had done magnificently in the attack on December the 19th, killing heaps of Turks with his own revolver and with another snatched from a Turkish officer. He had been recommended for gallantry. But he had never been quite the same since—to anyone who had eyes to see. Cheerful enough sometimes, but it was all forced ; and (this entirely between themselves) Hughes had once come upon him when he was handling his revolver in a most suspicious way.

Moulden ? Aha, yes ! That was the lad. There you'd put your finger on it. Moulden thought his methods very subtle and clever, but they were transparent enough, really : the lad's intelligence was of quite a low order. " You know what his method is, Bungay : he puts up a smoke-cloud of words about his liking for poor O'Grogan, and quietly lays his mines behind it. Once he came along to me to enjoy a discussion about you, but he got his *quietus* at an early stage, I can promise you. Yes, you come and see him off. See him off properly. I shall enjoy that. I'll stand in the alleyway outside and listen. The blighter's in his cabin three doors along." And Hughes' fingers closed on Tony's arm and guided him towards Moulden and Moulden's punishment.

Tony was a little disconcerted at being propelled to the interview so quickly. He would have liked a half-hour's preparation before being asked to release the virulent stream which he had imagined ; the width of three cabins was hardly space enough in which to find phrases. But he did not want to disappoint Hughes, who of his good nature had been virulent himself in his behalf, so he pushed his way into the cabin, setting his teeth and fanning up his wrath to the desirable heat. And as Moulden's face swung round to him, he said hurriedly (was not Hughes Anson waiting ?) : " I just came to tell you that you're a liar and a cad, Moulden."

From the alleyway without came an undeniable chuckle.

Moulden was palpably surprised by his visitor, and for a second abashed ; his lined face—Tony had forgotten how lined it was—flew a white flag at first, then a red signal, striped and mottled ; but he quickly covered the discomposure, and offered him a patient, forgiving smile.

" Hallo, O'Grogan. You back ? Why, good gracious, what's the matter ? You look——"

"I suppose you can't help it. It's a case of inferior breeding," said Tony brutally.

(Was Hughes Anson slapping his thigh?)

Moulden may have flushed, but it was clear that he had quickly resolved to remain cool and dignified, and so have the better of this sudden quarrel.

"Now look here, O'Grogan, you've lost your temper about something, or I shouldn't stand what you say—see? I mean, I never think it's sensible to take much offence—really—at what a fellow says in temper——"

"I don't care whether you stand it or not," spluttered Tony, whose style (so he found) was wretchedly spoiled by the consciousness of Hughes in the alley outside. "All I know is, you've been spreading lies about me, and it's time someone told you that you're a—a—an ill-bred cad."

(A magnificent slap outside.)

"Please, O'Grogan! You should make sure of your facts before you launch these accusations. I've been—I mean to say: put it like this: there's no doubt that a nasty idea about you has got abroad, but I've been careful to correct it whenever——"

"All you've been careful to do has been to strengthen it as much as possible by arguing as to whether it was true or not—I know!—instead of calling them bloody liars as an honest friend would—as Hughes Anson did——" (Hughes Anson, unable to call "Hear, hear!" dropped a brace of appreciative coughs.) "I've heard! Heaps of people have told me. Squirmy creatures like you are pretty quickly seen through, you know. You're not as clever as you think. You may imagine——"

"Look here, O'Grogan," said Moulden quietly, "I take it you've said all you want to say; would you mind leaving my room? I mean, I really am not going to fight you with your weapons. My breeding, such as it is, doesn't encourage me to do so."

"It's not a question of fighting at all. It's a question of—of telling you off. You know you've got nothing to say, so you try——"

"Would you mind leaving my room," repeated Moulden with great dignity.

"Certainly I'll go. I've no desire to contaminate myself longer than I need;" and he went out, slamming the door.

It was all abominably feeble, a schoolboy's outburst. Tony hurried away: hurried past Hughes Anson, who was bobbing up and down in the alleyway and slapping his thighs with delight, and who called after him, "Not bad, not bad, old boy. A bit crude in places;" hurried out on to the rain-beaten deck. The incident had no humour for him; he was completely miserable. What had he done with Moulden beyond harden him into a grimmer enemy than before? Now that poor narrow intelligence would work more and more assiduously to keep the libel prospering. And the shame of it! The shame of dubbing him a coward when the truth was that he could not feel physical fear; rather did his blood delight at the prospect of danger and battle. "Oh, it's no good. No good. I shan't say another word about it to anyone. I must try to bear the thing with dignity, as though it didn't exist; or as though it were too ridiculous to disturb me. And gradually I must live it down. And by God I will! Only give me time. The war's young yet. Give me time, Mr. Moulden, give me time."

The *Empress* went out of the harbour at dusk and turned south for Egypt; and the shadowy Lemnos hills fell astern and faded into history, as the shadows of Gallipoli had faded before them. She hugged the Greek islands, fearing the submarines which would assuredly try to catch the armies that had escaped from Gallipoli. Machine-guns were mounted at points along her gunwale; a good six-inch gun looked out of her stern; and the men carried their life-belts every minute of the day.

Where to now? France? Salonika? Mesopotamia? Egypt?—here was an army from Gallipoli ready to be offered. Who was going to have them? In a merry ship this was the merriest question. Anyone want any old rags and bones? Here we are, a secondhand lot—but any bids? Come now, who'll have us? We must be got rid of to someone, and we'll take on anything. "Any knives to grind? Any chairs to mend?"

As merry a laugh as any of them was Tony's. He kept up a fine façade of gaiety. No one should suppose that the whispering of little men could do so much as draw his eyes towards it. And Scrase, too: Scrase began to mend as

the Aegean widened between him and Gallipoli. Youth and laughter returned to his face. He would sit on the deck with Tony and watch the Greek islands going by in a pageantry of purple and blue ; and sometimes he would consent to argue as of old, but with hardly his former interest. To the worry entombed he gave no outlet. Not even to his friend O'Grogan.

Tony was the chief talker now. He would talk of the campaigns ahead of them, and their chances ; and of their lives after the war. There was an evening when he announced informatively, " We shall win this war, Kit."

" I'm glad," said Scrase. " But why, please ? "

" ' Why,' ' *why*,' fool ? Look there. And listen, my lad, listen ! "

They were leaning on a rail, looking down upon the men spread all over the main deck for'ard. Some were playing " House " ; some were singing to the accompaniment of Joe Wylie's mouth-organ ; some called out an occasional quip ; others slept. From the officers in the Smoking-room behind came the laughter and the singing of the cocktail drinkers. " Good-bye-ee," they sang, hammering on tables, " Good-bye-ee,

" Don't cry-ee, don't sigh-ee,
There's a silver lining in the sky-ee.
Bon soir, old thing ! Cheerio ! chin chin
Nah-poo ! Tootle-oo ! Good-bye-ee."

And the men on the deck :

" Oh ! Oh ! hold me tight,
Squeeze with all your might . . .
My beautiful Baby Doll ! "

" This is a defeated army, isn't it ? " said Tony, looking down upon the men."

" Certainly," Scrase allowed.

" And it's not in any way different from what it was when it came sailing towards Gallipoli, cocksure of victory. It's the same good-natured crowd—quite confident that it'll win in the end. And so it will, Kit. It'll win just because it's the best-natured army in the world. This old war is fast degenerating into a test of endurance, and, in such a test, the best-natured army will be bound to win. . . . Do you see ? " . . .

" Well, I hope you're right," said Scrase, rather wearily. " I hope it keeps fine for them."

"I *am* right. You wait and see! You just wait and see!"

When the curtain of that night lifted, it discovered a long line of white buildings, with here and there a group of palm trees or a tall tower; and at the eastern end the masts of much shipping. It was Alexandria.

The *Empress* crawled into the harbour, her soldiers shouting to all the ships as they passed, "Are we down-hearted? No!" She moored herself alongside a quay, and thereafter all was fun. How the men roared with delight! Hosts of Egyptian beggars had been awaiting the arrival of the troopship, and two or three native policemen, in yellow drill and cylindrical yellow helmets, were endeavouring with old bits of stick to chase them away from her sides. They whacked them with their sticks, and kicked them, and slapped them with their hands—men, women and children alike. One gave chase to an impudent little Arab boy—who immediately received the unanimous support of the crowd on the *Empress*; chased him under the railway trucks, and round the field kitchens and water-carts assembled on the quay, and over a barrier of canteen stores, till at last, abandoning pursuit, he contented himself with hurling his stick at the urchin, amid roars of derisive laughter from the decks of the *Empress*.

Pooh! These beggars and packmen and street entertainers couldn't have been dispersed by forty such constables. They took their thwacks across their shoulders but stayed where they were, or they ran at the approach of a policeman, only to troop back again when they saw him engaged on a punitive expedition elsewhere.

And the soldiers shouted encouragement.

"Yuss, you come back if you want to, but swelp me Bob, why didn't you leave your nightgown off before you came?"

"Hi! what price your harem skirt?"

"That's right, mate! *You* let the copper 'ave it! Put up your fists to him, lad."

Other soldiers were throwing pence to a conjurer who sat on his haunches and did wonderful things with coins and cards and eggs. Others cast a small fortune over a tiny little brown boy with fuzzy hair who, with a slice of wood for a rifle, went through nearly every motion of the drill-book with a smartness that drew mighty applause and laughter from his military audience.

"Move to the right in column of fours!" they yelled at him—

“Form *fours* ! . . . Here, jump to it, jump to it ! . . . Rear rank, one pace step back, MARCH !”

They tossed coppers into the pools which had formed on the quay that they might see the Arabs of either sex and every age scramble for the money, bowling each other over and sprawling on hands and knees in the filthy water. If a policeman bore down on the scrimmage and thrashed them where they bent, the *Empress* gave him its yells of laughter and abuse, but sometimes—be it admitted—its counsel and direction. Oh, a wonderful morning !

Now some of the senior officers were going down the gangway, and the “Gypies,” foreseeing a new source of income, swooped upon their baggage, five and six of them fighting for each valise. It was like nothing so much as the swarming of the Gallipoli flies over blobs of marmalade. A policeman raced up with a stick and dispersed them for ten seconds, as one scatters flies with a flourish of the hand. Some defied him and got whacked and kicked. More police happened along and chased them away, picking up lumps of coal from the quay and hurling them after the fugitives. Long practice had made them excellent shots, and often the coal caught the Gypies on the smalls of their backs or on the sides of their heads. You can be sure that every such winning shot brought roars of congratulation from the *Empress*. Oh my God ! ten hundred sides were aching with laughter. A wonderful morning !

And this—this surely—if one is telling of Gallipoli’s men rather than of its strategies, was the real close to that old story. It would ever be so for Tony. Not that unhappy midnight when the *Snaefell* carried him away from the glow-worm lights of W Beach astern ; not that anxious dawn in Lemnos when he heard explosions far away in the north-east and guessed that the rearguard had safely taken to the sea ; but this morning, brilliantly lit by an Egyptian sun, when a shipload of the tired and beaten army came alongside the quay of Alexandria, bringing nothing but laughter.

PART II

CHAPTER I

A MURMURING IN THE WILDERNESS

THE desert lay as yellow as sawdust under the cloudless sky. Its wide floor was empty, except for that interminable thread of men coming out of the gauzy heat in the distance with a smoke of dust at its side. Surely a whole brigade marching: perhaps a division. West of this moving column, across ten miles of plain, rose the Guebel Attakah Mountains, a long wall of mauve fronting the yellow sand. East of the column ran two ribbons of water: one, the Sweet Water Canal with its fringe of greenery, and the other, the Suez Canal itself, in a stern geometrical line. Beyond the canals rolled the sand dunes of the Sinaitic Peninsula, till they met the angry wall of the Mountains of Sinai.

The thousands of men in that serpentine column could not see the Sinai dunes because the high embankments of the Suez Canal shut in their view; they saw only the weary miles of desert ahead and the gaseous haze along its margins rising to meet the sun. They were marching northward. Soon they had left even such comfort as the deadly Sweet Water Canal could offer them; it was still at their side, but no longer did its moisture seem able to conquer the desert and raise the groves of palm and cactus; now it was fringed only with rushes, under which the frogs chattered and tiny lizards ran about with nervous and jerky movements. A cormorant wheeled out from the palm trees behind, and poised and volplaned over the marching men.

The faces of all these men were white with dust like the faces of over-powdered ladies; their eyelashes were hung with dust, and their eyebrows and hair grey with it. Their helmets were pushed back, and the sweat trickled through the dust into their eyes and mouths; and they spat often, and cursed;

and joked. On and on they marched, resting at every half hour for five minutes, and at every clock hour for ten ; during which blessed intervals their column disintegrated and became an interminable trail of recumbent soldiers. But praise God, there was an unforeseen halt, and a magnificently long one too, when they met the railway that runs beside the Suez Canal ; for a long line of cavalry, coming from the west, had converged upon the same point and was crossing the permanent way ; it was the Australian Light Horse trekking to the Canal. And hardly had these horsemen passed, tossing jibe for jibe to the poor infantry ; hardly had the infantry scrambled to its thousand feet again, before, coming from the north, a railway train of cattle trucks, packed with soldiers, steamed slowly across the head of their column, and stopped. Oh noble barrier ! we may all sit down again.

"Eh, lads, but we're theer !" Good Lancashire voices came from the train of cattle trucks.

"Theer ? This ain't a 'theer' ; it's nowhere. It's a bloody desert."

"We're getting down here, any road."

"Aye, we're theer, all reet—at side o' Canal."

"Room soart o' place. Ah reckon nowt to it, mesen."

"Goom ! Ah'm going sick. There's not a poob anywhere."

At the sound of these Lancashire voices, the marching column became as a crowd of welcoming friends who have been standing on a London platform awaiting the Manchester train. The 162nd (Essex) Division on the sands shouted greetings to the 126th (Lancashire) Division in the train. Two divisions had met and recognized each other in the desert.

"Strike me pink ! It's the procreating Lancashires ! From Gallipoli. 'Ere, Jim Stott, you can talk their infernal lingo. Arst 'em what they want 'ere."

Jim Stott : "Hallo, chooms ! Eh, but what are you doing in these parts ?"

The train : "Well, bah gum ! If it ain't the Royal West Essex fra t'owd Peninsula—foot sloggin' ! They coom fra Gallipoli too, tha knows. Yon's Big Jim Stott, fra Owdham. Whey, but what's oop, lads ; we thought you were all scuppered on t'Peninsula ? Are you cooming to defend this rotten cut (canal) as well, are you ?"

Jim Stott : "Aye. Are you ?"

"Nay! Coom to watch tha doing it. We're fed oop and made a Separate Peace. This is our Special train for Coop Tie. Hope it keeps fine for you. Where's Johnny Turk, any road?"

"Not above fifty miles owt theer, they say: in t'Sinai Desert, at t'ooother side o' Canal."

"Is he really coomin', then?"

"Sure as muk!"

"Well, Ah reckon he's aboot reet. We invaded his ruddy territory at Gallipoli, so why shouldn't he have a shot at ours? Goom, ain't it starvin' cold?"

"The whole Turkish army fra Gallipoli's coomin', they say."

"Well, I'm reet glad. We got on champion there. He's a gradely lad, is Johnny."

"Aye. We had a shot at his Narrers, so now he's having a shot at our cut!"

"Well, good luck to him! He can have it, for all I care."

"Saam here."

The Lancashires detrained and fell in, and their cattle trucks rolled away. The Royal West Essex marched on, crossing a little bridge which spanned the Sweet Water Canal. On its farther side they passed a group of transport men who, leading their horses and mules to water, had to halt here till the whole 15th Battalion in column-of-route had crossed. These transport men, with their shirts open and helmets pushed back, lolled about and studied the procession lazily but with much interest; for, to the end of the war, the British soldier remained a civilian under his khaki, and could spend a thrilling hour watching the march-past of armed men.

In companies the Royal West Essex boarded the chain-ferry and were conveyed across the Suez Canal. They were over; and, being over, stood in the sacred lands of Sinai. The old defences of the Canal were beside them; but they were to leave these behind and go many miles farther into the wilderness, towards the expected enemy. As they waited, they watched the gangs of "Gypsy" coolies, who were laying roads and light railways along the Sinai bank. A number of them were moving a giant timber from a barge, and they secured simultaneity of movement by reiterating in unison one dreary bar of song which sounded like, "Aye-yah-la! Aye-yah-la! Aye-yah-la!" A native foreman, armed with a whip, plied it here and there on their backs with an astonishing detachment and im-

partiality. Quite indifferent to whether the labourers he struck were working hard or not, he laid his stripes upon the just and the unjust, like Allah his God.

The long serpent of men reformed itself—and, at a word, pursued its writhing course through the sand dunes. Far softer this Sinai sand than the crisp desert floor on the other side of the Canal! As their boots sank in it above their uppers, the men cursed and joked and toiled on, while the sand flew away to leeward. They met the patrols of Indian Lancers who, mounted on Arab horses and holding their lances rigidly upright, were returning to the canal from their task of watching the wilds. They met the Bikanir Camel Corps—more turbanned warriors, high aloft on slender trotting camels. Then they passed no one, but seemed alone in the barrens of the Sinai Wilderness where the Children of Israel had wandered.

Sinai! What a name to conjure with! And this was it! Not an infinite flatness as one had imagined, but a stormy sea of sand, whose mountainous waves the wind had swept till their crests reared up in knife-edges against the sky or curved over like cornices in the Alpine snow. And what colours! Not a monotone of sandy grey, but long washes of mauve on the faces of the dunes, and streamers of rose where the sun-rays played upon their crests, and deep purple shadows in their fissures and their folds. And as one moved over their summits in the falling sun, one saw that the whole rim of the upturned sky had taken over the hues of sunset and the world was encircled in a riband of crimson.

In such a light as this the 15th Royal West Essex, with Colonel Tappiter at their head, compass in hand; and Hughes Anson, mounted on a fine Australian horse, leading A Company; and Kit Scrase, on a sprightly Arab, leading C Company; and Tony O'Grogan walking beside his platoon; and Quartermaster Weymann (who had succeeded Grimsby) bringing up the rear with his transport, came at last to their map-reference, where they must make their strong-posts and await the Turk. It was a level plain under the sand dunes with a wide field of vision before it.

“Battalion, halt!” roared Colonel Tappiter.

“Well, here we are,” said Scrase.

"Yes," Tony answered. "And now for the return match with Johnny."

Did a shade of fear cross Scrase's face, and his eyes turn away? Perhaps not: one could imagine these things; and for weeks now he had been his old witty self again.

"We seem to have marched out of the Iliad into the Bible," he said, looking around.

"Yes," Tony agreed in his enthusiastic way. "Yes, by jingo, and it's equally thrilling! I was thinking it out last night. Look here, old man: since this Sinai Peninsula is the natural road out of Asia into Egypt, it stands to reason that it wasn't only the Hebrew patriarchs who came this way, but the Syrians and the Assyrians and the Chaldeans and the Greeks and the Romans, and lastly Napoleon—that's so, isn't it?"

"Absolutely," Scrase allowed.

"Very well, then. It was time the British Empire fought here so as to be in the tradition. And, as you observed so correctly just now, here we are."

"We are," admitted Scrase facetiously.

"Jove! Then I think I'd rather be on this front than on any other!"

It was the morning after their arrival, and already a rectangular camp of bell-tents had spread itself on a sheltered lap of the dunes. A little way out in the desert two companies were digging in the soft sand a trench system or strong point, which was to be known as Leigh Post. Many miles away to the east cavalry were patrolling the solitudes in search of the enemy.

The sun blazed down and the sands burned, though February was not yet dead.

In the opinion of all, the Turk would come before May, because the hot season from May to October would make a campaign in the desert intolerable, even for him. He was sure to come. His German lords would see to it that he attacked the Canal, if only to contain and immobilize in Egypt the British army which had escaped from Gallipoli. The Germans didn't want this army, reinforced and reconditioned, to be thrown into the uneasy scales of France. And so it came to pass that Lieut. O'Grogan stood talking to Captain Scrase in a wilderness where once Jacob had talked with Joseph, his son, and, ten centuries later, Mary the Virgin had talked with Joseph, her mate, or played with Jesus her Child.

Tony, as sunrise after sunrise lit up the desert and awoke the

battalion to another day, was eager for the Turk to come. Haunted always by the knowledge that a lie about him was abroad in the brigade, he waited with a trembling eagerness for the hour when he should stagger them all with his heroism. So completely now was this obsession his master that he had forgotten all his old doubts about the righteousness of killing his enemies—hell! he would slay thousands of them if so he could re-establish his name—and he had relegated to a second place in his mind all his loving thoughts of Honor—why yes, oh yes, he was ready to die doing some heroic deed and to leave her, if thereby he silenced the lie for ever. Such a little thing, the lie; and it could shake him thus! In the battalion he could see that it was only half believed: clearly he was not unpopular in the big E.P. tent, where all the officers now messed together; nor did Moulden, within their own battalion, do anything to undersap this popularity. But with the other three battalions of the brigade, alas! whenever he visited their messes, he could feel the unseen thought chilling their formal welcome. All right, all right! let them but wait.

And the men? Who could know if they were talking still? Oh, it was horrid—horrid to think! Well, let them but wait.

He feared that Kit Scrase, no matter how lively his manner might be, had none of this stomach for the fight. Kit and he shared a bell-tent now, and sometimes Kit would mutter in his sleep. One night his voice awoke Tony, and it was muttering, "Oh God! . . . Oh God! . . ." Just like that. The buried pain was finding a voice in the night which would not come abroad in the day. And never in the day did Tony ask him about it, reverencing his reserve; but he believed that sooner or later Kit would speak.

Colonel Tappiter, though deeply wounded by the abandonment of the Gallipoli adventure, had clearly accepted his own creed that a soldier's personal fancies were "of no bloody importance at all," and was addressing himself with a tremendous energy and vocabulary to reshaping, repainting and repolishing his battalion for the coming fight.

"I'll tighten 'em up," he seemed to be thinking to himself. "Gallipoli has relaxed and jaded 'em. A strong dose of Prussian discipline is what they want. I'll smarten 'em up and make 'em a power."

So, on his new horse, a fiery bay of seventeen hands,

he cantered wrathfully among the young officers who were drilling their platoons during the early morning parades, and assured them that their words of command were poisonous. "Poisonous, sir, poisonous! How can you expect these men to move smartly to a poisonous word of command like that?" Hughes Anson swore that one morning the Colonel galloped down upon A Company and yelled, "Who the devil's in command of this undisciplined crowd?" "I am, sir!" snapped Hughes, a thought sharply. "Don't answer me back, sir!" roared the Colonel; and galloped away.

And Weymann, the new Quartermaster, told a tale of his own, for the Colonel's latest manner was the talk of the battalion. "The other morning the C.O. was riding home to camp past my dump, with blue murder all over his face, and, as bad luck would have it, the transport men were unloading the ration and water camels, and letting go with a few obscenities; and the Colonel heard 'em—heard 'em just at their richest, my lad!—and he jabbed his spurs into his horse and charged up and said, 'Why don't you wash out your dirty mouths? Don't think that foul language is soldierly, because it isn't! Just you learn to keep your tongues under better control!' And at that moment—oh my sainted aunt!—out came Sergeant Fortis, not seeing the Colonel, and yelled out, 'God almighty! Aren't those bloody camels unloaded yet?' The C.O.'s face—it just turned scarlet, and he galloped up to poor old Sergeant Fortis and spluttered, '*Good God alive*, man! Here am I rebuking some privates for using foul language, and a bloody sergeant comes out and sets them the example!'"

At first this Prussian behaviour of the Colonel had filled the officers with dismay and resentment, so that they nicknamed him, "The Hun" and "Von Tirpitz"; but later, by a curious transition, the resentment softened into affection. It was the affection which springs from mingled admiration and amusement. They had perceived the man's sterling loyalty to his job. And they had begun to suspect that there was as much humour as anger behind the Colonel's performances. Once he sent two of the companies out into the desert that they might practise marching by compass, and both of them, owing to the mismanagement of their young officers, were soon as lost as the flocks of Bo Peep. On their return, somewhat chastened, the Colonel assembled all the officers in the

mess tent, including Weymann the Quartermaster; and to the surprise of all he turned his guns against the Quartermaster.

"It's your fault entirely, Weymann, your fault entirely!"

"Me, sir?" exclaimed Weymann, and one could hear him thinking, "What the hell——"

"Yes, *you*, sir," retorted the Colonel. "Didn't I tell you to indent for a wet nurse for each of these officers, and have you done it?"

Or look at his very different deportment on Sunday mornings when Padre Quickshaw came riding out to camp and held a Communion Service in the Sergeants' Mess for all men who cared to come. Always old Tappiter appeared, "slick on time, and polished up to the nines," and put up his spectacles to read his prayer-book, and knelt in the back row of all, behind the meanest of his men.

After Gallipoli's labours and pains the men were happy in this tented camp-life under a perpetual sun. Only the new drafts from England complained of the stewing heat in the tents and the freezing cold at nights; of the hard parades in the early morning, and the endless monotony of rest under canvas while the sun possessed the desert, and then the hard parades and fatigues of the cooling night. The gaiety of the camp expressed itself in many ways. There were the mascots.

Hughes Anson had a mascot—a veteran mascot from Gallipoli. It was a small tin beetle, the size of a half-crown whose motive power was derived from some elastic in his intestines. On the Peninsula Hughes had shaped for him a little dug-out next his own; and when empty of something to do, would set him charging into the sides of the trench or raiding in No-Man's Land at the end of a length of string. He called him Captain Jackson. But here in Sinai his elastic became "time expired," so Hughes promoted him to Temporary Major on the ground that he had very little to do. And if you went into Hughes' tent he troubled you to salute him.

The men's mascot was Absolom. Absolom the mule. When the battalion moved in column-of-route, Absolom would trot the whole length of the column with his head turned towards the men, exactly as if he were inspecting their

march; and Joe Wylie, as the mule passed, would call out to the men ahead, "Hey there, boys! Pick your feet up! Get into step now! Absolom's looking at yer! . . . Nah it's too late; you're *for* it, he's gawn awf to report you to the C.O."

And of course Wylie himself was seldom without a mascot; and the mascot might be anything from a chameleon, gathered gingerly off a twig of Sinai brush, to a young donkey. Usually, however, it was a mongrel pup, probably, some little furry Ishmael abandoned by a pariah Abraham as he crossed the desert sands. Joe must have dragged about (or been dragged about by) half a dozen different dogs during the three years he served Lieut. O'Grogan as batman. In this brief period of settled—one had almost said "pastoral"—life on the desert, the companion and favourite at the end of his leash was the young donkey, Billy; though the animal was not wholly his own, since he shared parts of it with his disciple, Art Webster. Wylie and Art Webster would bring Billy to the football matches of the battalion and run him up and down the touch-line to keep him abreast of the game; or they would pinch him (but not unkindly) to make him applaud a fine piece of play with his own peculiar cheer. If the game was slow and void of interest, they slyly paid out his rope and encouraged him in his friendly habit of biting the shorts and the puttees of the nearest man. It was friendly, and nothing else; he did it without a trace of viciousness; it was just his manner, when bored for lack of entertainment, of exchanging the time of day with his neighbour, and a pleasantry.

Lieut. O'Grogan was once bitten in the calf by Billy, and the way the creature showed a care to close his jaws just enough to pinch agreeably but not enough to hurt convinced him, and all who stood by cheering, that Billy was not such an ass a he looked.

It was on a famous occasion that Billy bit Lieut. O'Grogan. A new draft of officers had arrived the previous day, and Padre Quickshaw was soon at Tony's tent demanding their whereabouts that he might visit them as their parish priest. Tony was trafficking in sugar with Billy at the time, and he stipulated that he would walk with the padre among the tents of Israel and introduce him to the new subalterns, if Billy might come too. Quickshaw said he had no objection to Tony's making a fool of himself if he wanted to; and Tony, having no objection either, immediately seized Billy's head-rope and

endeavoured to drag him along the Officers' Lines. But Billy was not keen : he had to be persuaded to this bit of church work. Tony organized the persuasion in front and rear of him. He himself pulled in front, and another loyal layman who had been urgently summoned, Kit Scrase, pushed powerfully behind. Now Billy never objected to being pulled ; he was rather partial to it, since it soon became a sportsmanlike tug-of-war in which he could feel that, if he was being defeated, he was not being disgraced ; but to be pushed, to feel the pressure of a hot hand on either side of his tail, or a shoulder in the midst of it, was always more than his good nature could endure : so Scrase had not been pushing and shoving—and shouldering—for any length of time before Billy got vexed with him and leapt forward and bit Tony.

Then Joe Wylie and Art Webster took him off to Three Days' C.B., first disgracing him by the removal from around his neck of the huge Iron Cross engraved "For Kultur."

Football had now resumed its rightful place in men's lives. Football on the Peninsula, under the frown of Achi Baba, had been discouraged in the latter days ; which was perhaps a reason why most men accounted Gallipoli the worst front of the war. In the Wilderness of Sinai, where you could find little flats of hard, crisp, salty sand, amid the powdery softness of the dunes, football grounds of a very fair quality were marked out in no time. So it fell that, before the Turks came down upon the Canal, there was played the great and famous match, "Officers v. Sergeants." We must hear about this.

CHAPTER II

OFFICERS *v.* SERGEANTS

THE men chose to regard this match as entertainment of the first order. Joe Wylie painted an announcement of it and hung it outside his tent: "Stars *v.* Stripes or Brains *v.* Brawn." Another advertisement stated that two ambulances would be in attendance. But it promised to be a far more serious contest than this foolery suggested. There were among the sergeants three or four who could play the Soccer game with the best of its amateurs, and one, as the whole Division knew—one, Sergeant Lewis, who, though a Jew of Whitechapel, London, had played as a professional for Huddersfield Athletic. And the officers had been enriched by the recent draft with two young men, one from Malvern and one from Westminster, both of whom had been in their First XI's, and one of whom had subsequently played for the Corinthians; so they came, bringing no slender sheaves of reputation with them. As both these youths were attached to C Company and were likely, therefore, to be near companions of Tony till wounds or death, a sketch portrait of them must be given here. They were Harold Wimborne and Bernard Aylwin.

Harold Wimborne, the Malvern and Corinthian boy, was a big handsome lad, fair-haired, blue-eyed, and fair-skinned, and, in fine, as perfectly Saxon in appearance as anyone from our Islands has a right to look nowadays. Though he had passed his twenty-second birthday and was older by two years than Aylwin, and and though his height could not have been much under six feet nor his chest under forty inches, he was assuredly the youngest thing in the battalion. Uproarious and mischievous one hour, and blushing and timid the next; impudent to his seniors in the mess, and slightly afraid of them on parade; terrified (as he

confessed) of the sergeants, but sharp as a colonel with them if by a liberty they offended his youthful self-consciousness; blushing with shame every time he shouted his word of command, though it was an excellent word of command and would scatter a covey of birds half a mile away; giggling like a schoolboy when any misadventure occurred, or when the men looked somewhat ridiculous doing "Physical Jerks" at his invitation; bathing every morning (since "It's done, old man; it's simply done") in a ground-sheet pressed down into a hole, and singing and shouting in his bath; at mess loudly upholding every prejudice, every convention and every snobbery that one supposed to have been abandoned by intelligent persons fifty years before; bruised even to disbelief when Tony and Scrase declared themselves socialists; crudely uninformed about literature and music and art, but greatly informed about motor-cycles; happy, conceited, willing, keen, dandified, diffident—there was hardly anything in him (unless it was his football) from which the stamp of the Fourth Form at Malvern had been erased. Hughes Anson early nicknamed him "Childe Harold," and Childe Harold he remained till they knew him no more.

Aylwin was marvellously different. A year younger than any of them, he was ten years older than all. He even looked older, his mouse-coloured hair being worn rather long and unkempt after the fashion of Intellectuals, his eyebrows meeting in a thoughtful frown, his green eyes fixing you without a trace of diffidence, and shining with intelligence, and his cheeks hollowed under the eyes, probably by the work of his rapid and unresting brain. Aylwin was undoubtedly clever, but not as clever as he supposed. He spoke with authority and immense information on every subject under the sun and on most above it; to Scrase, Tony and Moulden he expounded the whole truth about the Gallipoli campaign, even to describing the life in its trenches, and not for one moment did he pause to imagine that they who had been there might know as much about it as he who had never been within a hundred miles of Cape Helles; to the gunner officers he catalogued the varying calibres of British, German, and French guns; to the officers of the Camel Corps he sketched the nature of the camel; and to the Transport Officer he explained gall and spavin, shock and overreaching and thrush—till the T.O. damned him to his face and, behind his back, lifted up his voice and cursed him

loud and long. Hughes Anson called him "Aylwin the Authority," and there an end.

But Childe Harold and Aylwin had one thing in common, the excellence of their football. Harold Wimborne played it with all the genius of his magnificent young body; Aylwin with all the subtlety of his restless brain. To these two champions the officers' team could add nine others, all young, trim, light and athletic. Of those known to us Scrase was a Full Back who could be trusted to play with his head, Hughes Anson was as dashing, jovial and popular leader of the Forward Line as ever he was of a raiding party visiting the Turkish trenches, and Tony was admittedly the fastest man on either side. Moulden did not play the game; and what with his jealousy of those who did, and of O'Grogan in particular, and his growing hatred of the fixture and his simulated enthusiasm for it, he was probably living some very unquiet days. In youth and mobility the Officers would enjoy a great advantage over the Sergeants, who must array in defence of their citadel some very heavy ordnance indeed—"some 1895 models," as Childe Harold put it—such as, by your leave, the Regimental Sergeant-Major. And the officers would have large reserves of wind in hand when the supply of the Sergeants was running low, if complexions and waist-lines were any guide to the state of the wind. On the other hand, weight was with the Sergeants; and there were those among the men who declared that to set some of the junior officers against the sergeants was little better than cruelty to children. Anyhow, a great game promised, and a highly amusing one.

Interest ran high on the vigil of the match, and the betting likewise; and the odds were five piastres to three on the Officers. The Officers were favourites in every sense; and they were much gratified to discover that the men, when it came to a choice between their officers and their sergeants, would yell for the Lesser Evil through thick and thin; it was their chance of a lifetime to get some of their own back on the Sergeants; with an especial reference, as will be seen, to the Regimental Sergeant-Major.

But wait! a secret. Did any knight in this most famous tournament approach its hour with his thoughts driven by quite such a childish whip as Lieut. O'Grogan? Oh, he knew all about the absurdity of the whip that chafed him, but it disciplined his sides none the less, and drove him in its narrow

way. The men who watched the game had disputed among themselves whether or not he had shown cold feet on Gallipoli ; he must shine in front of them ; he must dazzle them with his fearlessness, his fury, and his address. There were Fred and Dicky Roberts to be impressed, and Ernie Botten, who would take home to Twineham a record of young Mr. O'Grogan of Sheep's Eye, and Jim Stott, who had fought his battles, and all the men, lately joined, who had probably been piqued very early with the story that dimmed his name. And Moulden. Moulden, on his touch-line, should suffer every pang of jealousy that cheers for his enemy could give him.

The teams, when they arrived upon the ground, the evening sun being low on the dunes, saw that every man of the battalion who was not confined by duty to the trenches, or by discipline to the Guard Room, was waiting on the touch-line in a high expectation ; and some remarked a strange thing, that every fourth man held a whistle, or a mouth-organ, or an empty box, or a brass shell-case, or some other instrument which could contribute, when desired, to a din. Good-night, what now ! What did this portend ?

The whistle sounded, and there was a silence—so far all was natural : this was the silence of anticipation. But it endured, this silence—endured till it became uncanny, discomforting, ominous. What was toward ? Tony, playing as Outside Right, glanced down his touch-line and over to the opposite one ; and the stillness of six hundred men was so abnormal a thing that it shook his heart a little. There was no sound beneath the sky except the pounding of the ball upon the ground and the voice of the players, which seemed to echo in the evening light.

Ten seconds, and he understood. The ball reached the toe of the Regimental Sergeant-Major, and straightway every whistle, mouth-organ, petrol can, clapper, cymbal and other instrument of music made the desert horrible with noise ; the Sergeant-Major, at a moment due and just, passed the ball to a colleague, and all was peace again ; it returned to his foot and the joyous uproar broke out afresh ; after dribbling it a dozen yards (to this accompaniment) he transferred it, as was proper, to his Centre Forward, and immediately the uproar ceased with soldierly smartness. The Sergeants, apprehending this little *jeu d'esprit*, began to direct the ball towards their senior perhaps more often than was warranted by the

chances of the game; and certainly Captain Hughes Anson, at Centre Forward for the Officers, once or twice overshot his mark and drove the ball nearer to the Sergeant-Major than to his own Wings; to the great content of the soldiers, who saw to it that all such courtesies were rewarded with a hideous volume of sound. The Sergeant-Major grinned—no more—and took every advantage of his favoured position. In these first few minutes of the game he had more opportunities of shooting goals than any other player on the field; but he was not a good shot, as a hysteria of cheers, whistles, cat-calls and percussion emphasized a score of times that evening.

After this humorous overture the game settled down to a right grim tussle, little quarter being asked or given. Neither Sergeants nor Officers were ever so set on beating the Turks as they were on beating each other to-night; maybe the Sergeants were stung by the incessant cheering of their opponents, and the Officers flattered. Tony, driven by his private whip, was playing, he believed, as never before in his life. With Childe Harold as his Inside Right, and Aylwin, a concentrated blob of will-power and subtlety, just behind him, as Right Half-back, his Wing was the very sickle-blade of the attack sweeping round to the Sergeants' goal. Again and again Tony's exceptional speed whisked the game from mid-field to the flank of the enemy's goal, and again and again Childe Harold or Hughes Anson shot the ball furiously at the posts—only to be met by the miracle-working hands of Sergeant Waller, who was fighting for his threatened gateway with a lightning swiftness that drew for him, not once, nor twice, but unnumbered times, the tumultuous applause of the crowd (notwithstanding they were backing the other side) and the seemlier hand-clapping of the Officers.

At last, by such a rush on his wing, Tony carried the game from one end of the field to the other, and centred the ball with a lucky shot straight in front of Hughes Anson, who fainted towards the goal and then passed the leather—at all costs let us describe this matter in the true language—passed the leather, we say, with a scream "Shoot!" to Childe Harold, who shot it with such instancy and force that not even Sergeant Waller knew anything about it, and it streaked between the posts and raced away toward the open desert and the Turkish Empire. Now every box, can, whistle, clapper and gong, and every uvula acclaimed the first goal; while Tony jog-trotted

happily back to mid-field, trying to look modest but feeling a triumph sparkling in his throat; and Childe Harold ran beside him, gurgling with the delight of a prep-schoolboy; and Aylwin called out solemnly, "Well done, O'Grogan. Well done, Wimborne," as if he were older than either of them and captain of the team.

It was a short-lived triumph, for Sergeant Lewis, indignant that a team which contained no professional from Huddersfield Athletic should have scored the first goal, executed a mad and mighty rush of his own (and one not at all related to his true position in the field), and scored a thumping goal before anyone fully realized that the play had restarted. He did it rather as if he could do that sort of thing at any time when there was an urgent call upon him, and trotted back to his own place with a posse of Sergeants beside him clapping him between the shoulder-blades.

One goal all; and now the deluge; or rather, rush after rush by this side and the other, and then fierce frustration in front of the nervous goals. For every rush of the Sergeants there were two and more by the Officers, though all unavailing; and Tony could not doubt (had he wanted to, which he certainly didn't) that the honours were around his brows and Childe Harold's and those of the tireless Instructor, Aylwin. He was happy—electrically happy, and more than once his eyes swept the crowd to make sure that Moulden was there among the watchers.

Half-time, and the scores still level. Half-time over, and the teams arrayed again.

"We've got 'em!" gurgled Childe Harold to Tony. "Their wind will give out soon now. They had to get ahead of us in the first half or be beaten. *I'm* not at all winded, are you? Look at 'em puffing and panting! Look at the R.S.M.! We've got 'em, Bungay!—got 'em by the seat of their bags!"

"Why not say we've got them by their *pants*?" suggested Tony, and with this capital jest still warming him, he charged into the newly-opened play.

The excitement of the crowd was tremendous now; they had set their hearts, not so much on the Officers winning as on the Sergeants losing. And they yelled to the Officers to get on with it and win. Many a time that evening Tony was delighted to hear private soldiers shouting, "Go it, O'Grogan! that's the stuff to give 'em! Go it, O'Grogan! Let 'em

see yer 'eels!" Or even in excessively humorous moments, "Go it, *Tony*, my man. Knock 'im dahn, the great 'ulking brute!" Often he heard the familiar brogue of Corporal Jim Stott uplifted in encouragement of his friends among the officers: "That's reet, let him have it, lad. Oh, good lad, good lad! That's our Mr. O'Grogan, tha knows, of C Company; they're the lads! Good owd Noomber 9 Platoon!"

"Aye-yah-la! Aye-yah-la! Aye-yah-la!" chorused a group of men who were pretending to be Gypsy coolies.

"Eh, but he's got it again—eh, take it along; tha can beat yon feller sure as muk—that's done him!" shouted Jim Stott. "Eh, but he can play this game, our officer—he can and all! Whey, what's oop, lad? Tha mustn't be beaten by yon feller, the great soft chump. 'Ere! take his name and noomber!"

"Aye-yah-la! Aye-yah-la! Aye-yah-la!"

And sometimes Jim was encouraging the Sergeants in their own parade-ground fashion: "Get a move on now! Pick up your feet now; pick 'em oop!" And sometimes he was jeering at them: "Hey, lad, but hast tha never learnt this game? Where were tha fetcht oop? Goom, Ah'd be ashamed to be beaten by a little 'un like that; he doan't look more nor ten year owd. . . ."

"Aye-yah-la! Aye-yah-la! Aye-yah-la!"

In the spells when the game was on the other side of the field and Tony could order his breath and think again, he gave thought to this extraordinary scene and found evidence in it of that strange, illogical, pragmatic wisdom of the British. This apparent upheaval, for an hour, of all discipline, smiled upon by the officers and the N.C.O.s as they played their game, and by Colonel Tappiter who stood by watching with spectacles on nose, would it not have scandalized the Germans and the French, and yet did it not, in the long run, make for discipline? Men could not stomach too much repression; and so, in this legalized outburst of ribaldry, let resentments which else might fester under the skin escape in laughter!

True, no doubt; but the business immediately to hand was to win this match. And confound it, the second half was wearing away, and the light was wearing away, and the score still stood at "One all." Something must be done about it. "Oh, one more goal! One more goal, Bungay!" cried Childe Harold in a prep-school agony. "Just one more goal!"

"Right you are!" Tony promised. "Certainly."

"Gee, we must win, we must win, we must beat the blighters!" Harold explained.

"We will. Dinna fash yersel'," said Tony.

"Yes, but there's only ten minutes more," bewailed the Childe.

"It is enough," said Tony royally.

And even as he spoke, a voice from behind, the voice of the self-appointed Instructor, Aylwin, shouted, "Christ! There you are, O'Grogan!" and the ball from off the Instructor's boot shot twenty yards down the field from Tony. He raced for it; and Sergeant Perrin, of the other faction, raced for it. The touch-line chorused *fortissimo*. The game came racing after them. Tony had farther to run than the sergeant, but he ran much faster, and he deprived that gentleman of the ball with a whole three inches to spare, while a roar went up to the darkening sky. The ball is his now: he centres; Hughes has it—Crash!—the ball has hit the cross-bar, which shivers as if only a hair's-breadth this side of splintering—Damn!—the chance has gone, but no, the ball has rebounded into play and Childe Harold is on it—*Plonk!*

Oh Hallelujah! *Goal!*

That'll be the end. Only five minutes more, and the Officers will keep the Sergeants out of their goal like men inspired. The whistle—at last the whistle—and Tony's hands fall forward to his knees as he gasps, "Oh my God. I'm just about done, aren't you?"

"Three cheers for the Sergeants," calls Hughes Anson—ho, but one has wind for *that*, by Jove! Everywhere it is given with a will, the men who have got their wish adding a few hundred voices to its volume and sending their caps into the air.

"Three cheers for the Awficers!" calls Sergeant Lewis.

Let 'em go, boys; and then all troop home, for the evening star is over the dune.

CHAPTER III

THE ASSEMBLY BEATS

IN the mess that night after the Headquarters officers had withdrawn, Hughes Anson led the celebrations: he led them as rosily as he had led the Forward Line on the field; to be sure, he led those who would be his forwards now right through the pleasant goal of intoxication. In this new game Tony may be said to have played half-back while Scrase remained at full-back and Moulden stayed on the touch-line. Childe Harold, on the other hand, was a forward every whit as inflamed as his leader.

"One more whisky," said Rosy, "and I shall be reasonably tight—John, bring another whisky—and then I think I shall make a speech."

"Oh hell, no!" hiccoughed Childe Harold. "Blazes, no! Play the game!"

"Well then, Aylwin shall—Aylwin the Authority. Aylwin shall explain the game of Soccer to us and where we went wrong, and how we can do better next time." He hammered for Aylwin on the table. "Aylwin, Aylwin, Aylwin."

"Aylwin'll see you damned first," said that astonishing youth. "You're drunk."

"What!" exclaimed Hughes. "*What!* May your house be destroyed and your religion perish." In compliment to these times and these places Hughes had long been specializing in Arabian curses. "I'm not drunk, father of sin. At least, not half so drunk as the Childe."

"Well, come on then," shouted Harold, who, being a very ordinary youth, thought it a fine thing to outstrip his seniors in the ways of the world. "Catch me up. I'll wait for you to cash me up."

"Right! Here goes!" Hughes tossed off another glass of whisky. "Ah! that's given me quite a lift. Now I *do*

feel rather rich. Allah is merciful. Now I think I shall make my speech."

The "Yes, yes!" of several officers quite drowned the Childe's "For pity shake no."

"The Ayes have it," Hughes announced; "Allah is good;" and without rising, he began: "Well, gentlemen, I propose to you the health of the Sergeants of this battalion—our splendid, our magnificent—I would almost say, our corking Sergeants——"

"*Un*-corking," Tony suggested.

"*Uncorking* is suggested by Lieutenant Tono Bungay. That may or may not be apposite, but it is a custom in this mess for a pun to be paid for by drinks all round. That's so, isn't it, Mr. Vice?—John, bring some more whisky and put it down to Mr. O'Grogan. Well, gentlemen, this question of the Sergeants uncorking: I would have come to it, had not Bungay taken the words out of my mouth, curse his father. And may his mother's tomb be defiled. I was going to observe first, what may or may not have been observed before, that the N.C.O.s are the backbone of the British Army. Take that part, however, as said—you know how it goes——"

"Backbone of Brish Army," supplied Harold, immediately and redundantly.

Hughes looked at him; and, like the levite and the priest, left him in his present condition and continued his journey: "I say now it was a privilege, gentlemen, a privilege to meet these sergeants in battle and to give 'em such a hiding, curse their fathers. For though we only beat 'em by one goal, the initiative was ours from the first minute to the last, and we maintained a steady offensive—I mean to say, we were on top of 'em—absolutely on top of 'em—really. Does anyone deny that?"

No one did.

"Certainly not. Allah is just. And this great, this signal victory was due in no small measure to the achievements of our latest recruit, H. Wimborne, commonly called Childe Harold, who, if he knows nothing about soldiering, can at least play football, which is much more important." (Cheers.)

"Oh, shut up!" muttered Wimborne, abashed.

"Eh?—what? Shut up yourself. May your religion perish. Am I making this speech or are you? To the achievements of Harold, I said, and to those of Bungay on his wing"

—(Cheers)—“and of those of myself as centre forward. . . . Thank you, gentlemen. Allah reward you, and may your night be happy and blessed. . . . Yes—and—er—and here it may not ill become me to tell you that to-day chances to be also the birthday of young Harold”— (“Not really! Liar!”) —“and he, I cannot doubt, will shortly do the perfect gentleman by us and enable us to wet the occasion suitably. But that, sir”—no one was quite clear who the “sir” might be—“that, sir, is by the way. About these bloody sergeants: I propose—I mean, what’s wrong with sending ’em along a crate of beer?” (Loud endorsements.) “There’s a lot of that foul Japanese stuff, of course; but I suggest, sir, that we send ’em a dozen of Dog’s Head brand. John—John, come here! How are we off for beer? Is there enough of . . .”

The speech had nose-dived very abruptly into a business conversation with John Stevens, the mess corporal, as to the quantity of beer in the mess stores and the chances of further supplies coming up on the morrow’s camels; and during this murmured catechism Moulden stretched forth a hand and helped himself to some of the whisky provided by Tony. Moulden had remained at the table of the revellers, though wishing beyond doubt that he was anywhere else: it was the nature of the man to show to the world an outer wall that had no connection with his inner thoughts. He had smiled dutifully, but not happily, at the jocularities of the speaker, and had tapped the table with his knuckles when the plaudits sounded for Tony, though, probably, they had painfully fretted him. Now, since it was Tony’s whisky, he lifted his glass to him and toasted, “Cheerio, O’Grogan. And congrats.”

“Thanks,” acknowledged Tony. “But *I* didn’t do much. Harold is the lad.”

“Not a bit more than you were. You were the fastest on the field—really. My aunt! you can run.”

Instantly a little bullet of doubt lodged in Tony’s brain and ached there. Had the fellow meant anything by the word? Oh no, no; it was a word natural enough.

“I’m not as fast as I used to be,” he said poorly.

“Aren’t you?” Moulden’s eyebrows lifted. “I only wish I could run half as fast—really. It’s a useful accomplishment in the army.”

Tony’s control slipped; he had had his whisky with the others.

"The devil!" he flashed. "What do you mean by that?"

Silence froze the company, and all eyes turned on him and Moulden.

"Damn! nothing," assured Moulden with a laugh, though averting his eyes. "Can't you stand a joke? You *do* rise to it."

"I don't!" denied Tony, yet more feebly. Sickening almost to tears, he knew that he had blundered again: he had betrayed to all what he was thinking; he had reminded them all of the half-forgotten story against him. To-morrow the thirty officers would be discussing this passage between him and Moulden.

"I'm sorry if I offended you," said Moulden, pursuing his advantage. "But I'm blowed if I see how—really."

"Oh, don't you!" sneered Tony, for he could only follow the road he had taken.

"No. Come, come." Moulden raised his glass again. "Cheerio, old man; and all the best to you. I mean: you mustn't be as sensitive as that."

He smiled at Tony, who glared back.

Neither spoke again; and Hughes Anson, who had been staring from one to the other, announced brightly, "Well, *that's* over. Allah is just. Now about this beer for the Sergeants."

The general cheerfulness survived for a month or two; but all the time the desert was encroaching upon it. Slowly, steadily, the power of the desert came out from its illimitable distances and spread weariness and depression over the camps. With the torrid months of April, May and June, the power heightened: an intense heat came off the burning dunes and hit men's flesh like the hot breath from a horse's nostrils; a glare came off the whitened sands and bullied their eyes and forced an ache across their brows; and out of the north-west, persistently, came a wind, carrying the driven sand into all things—into food and drink and beds, eyes and mouths and ears. There was no letting down the flies of the tents to resist its entry, or the oven-heat beneath the canvas would have been unbearable. Even so, even with the flies rolled up, the candles dissolved out of sight like ghosts, leaving only their

wicks behind, for their tallow would melt in a noontide hour and percolate away through the sand. From the doors of their tents men could watch the heat rising off the ground in a glassy and trembling haze, as an invisible gas rises; and behind this gauzy nothing the scrub patches or the telegraph posts trembled like palsied limbs. And from the tops of the dunes they could see the mirage at play between earth and heaven creating lakes and blue islands and rippling seas where, in truth, lay nothing but the wilderness.

Cynically the desert was shaping them into dulled creatures of itself. The desert was the earth in apathy; and in these men, who sought against nature to dwell and flourish there, it induced the accommodating apathy.

They became physically apathetic. With no more enthusiasm than that shown by victims of forced labour, men and officers did their marches, padding like camels over the sand; they manned their outposts, dug their fortifications, and when a dangerous mist overlaid everything, stood to arms in them; they rebuilt the trenches as often as, with great sand-slides, their walls collapsed; but, on dismissal, they retired to their roasted tents where they reclined in listlessness or sleep, as inanimate as the desert itself.

They became intellectually apathetic. No longer was there any written or spoken word that forced a mental effort. The books, such as could be got, were the lightest of novels; and the conversation at meals trifled around the revetting of trenches, the mismanagement of the mess, the latest bawdy story, the rag-time character of the dud British army, and the thanks due to God that Britain had a navy. All were agreed that Johnny Turk would not come now in the depth of the hot season, and therefore this was no longer warfare but mere playing at soldiers; and they, a division of Peninsula veterans, ought to go to France immediately, and leave these bloody desert outposts to a few patrols of Boy Scouts. Intellectuals like Scrase and Tony knew that their faculties were now so enervated that profundity of thought and fluency of expression would have to be cultivated anew when they returned to the places of civilization. Their minds were becoming fruitless as the desert.

Twice the outer world reached them. One April day a gorgeous General, plump and shining from his headquarters in a Cairo hotel, came out to inspect them, with a cavalcade of

staff officers behind him, and a pennon taking the north-west wind in front. They escorted him around all their little sights, and he seemed as interested as a child who was being shown Nelson's *Victory* for the first time. Hughes Anson avouched that when the cavalcade passed a certain wall of sacking, which screened an oblong space privily withdrawn to the camp's rear, the General pointed at it with his crop and inquired what manner of place it might be. It was the men's latrines, said Colonel Tappiter. "Oh, excellent! excellent!" exclaimed the General; and Colonel Tappiter nodded agreement, saying, "Yes, it was quite a good idea."

Another day came a G.R.O. announcing the Gallipoli awards. They were amazingly generous; Serbia had offered a large helping of her "Orders of the White Eagle" for distribution among the British who had fought on the Peninsula, and something had to be done with them. Almost every officer of the 15th R.W.E.s who had stayed with them to the end received a White Eagle. Moulden had one and Grimsby. Scrase and Hughes Anson received the higher honour of the Military Cross. So did Padre Quickshaw: mainly, it was believed, because he had come off the Peninsula, on the night of the evacuation, sitting on a crate of whisky for the Brigadier. Colonel Tappiter received a C.B.

The 15th had Quickshaw into the Mess to wet his Military Cross; but he pooh-poohed it and all their White Eagles too. "They're nothing to pat oneself on the back about," he said. "I happen to know what happened—haw, haw! There was a blooming clerical error at G.H.Q.—just what you'd expect. They made out two lists of names: one of those officers who deserved medals, and another of those who deserved to be sent home—and of course they got 'em jumbled up and forwarded the second list to the Department of Awards, or whoever it is that issues out this junk. I'm not at all sure that I shall wear my ribbon, meself." All were delighted with this story and declared that it was undoubtedly the true explanation of their medals.

There was no medal for Tony: not even a mention in the dispatches. His friends, of their tact, forbore from all comment, but their kindly silence was harder to bear than comment.

And some of the men, to his knowledge, pointed the omission and grumbled in his honour.

"Why_{be} didn't get_{summat}," said Corporal Jim Stott, "Ah

never could reckon meself. He had more plook and more brains nor most of them, and 'appen that's t'reason why."

"I'd have given to 'im before that there Moulden," said Fred Roberts, and forthwith relieved his loyalty to Mr. O'Grogan by a very long and very sour defamation of Moulden's character, who had rebuked him that day for an untidy kit. "Mr. O'Grogan's a gentleman, whatever else he may be," he concluded.

"Aye. 'Appen you're right," said Corporal Stott.

The day the awards were published Tony went into his tent and wrote to Honor :

"My Dearest,

"I wonder what you are doing now as I write to you. It is 120 in the shade here—only there isn't any shade—and about 520 in one's tent, so I am missing you and Jill and Peggy and Joyce more than I can say. It is difficult writing: the khamsin is blowing, and the fog of flying dust carries away the paper as I write on it. And I have to get up every ten minutes to make lemonade, owing to the dipsomania the heat induces. Which reminds me—as you love me, send some lemonade powder and crystals and invite Jill and Peggy and Joyce to go and do likewise. Nothing's happening here; and I want to get to a livelier campaign after five months' waiting for the Turks. You know, there is such a thing as the lure of the shells. If you once get gripped by their fascination you can't listen to the artillery practising here without wishing that it were the real thing—without feeling a kind of homesickness for the shells. At least, I do. It may be a kind of perverted appetite for thrills, but it's just what I feel. So let's hurry up with that move to France, and I shall get leave! I am wanting you dreadfully, would you believe it? Write and tell me something about the war. . . ."

There was no move to France. One sultry night of July there flashed from Headquarters in Cairo to Leigh Post in Sinai the call to arms. Aerial reconnaissance had reported the Turks massing in force with guns and stores and camels east of Romani. Romani was the railhead of a full-gauge railway which, starting from El Kantara on the Canal, had been pushed twenty miles into the desert. Turks massing east of Romani! Aylwin explained everything to everybody: this meant that they had come across the Sinai Peninsula from their base at El Arish, hugging the Mediterranean, and would attempt the Canal at Kantara.

And it was July. They had belied all prophecies, defied all precedents, and come in the hot season. Was this their strategic surprise, or had the Somme Battle far away in France (as Aylwin asserted—nay, knew) forced their hand? When Colonel Tappiter, that torrid July night, came into the mess with news that the battalion would abandon Leigh Post in the morning and march through midsummer heat to the Canal bank, it chanced that the little scratching gramophone was playing “The Blue Dragoons.”

“For God’s sake,” he laughed, “stop that thing! We shall have blue dragoons enough to-morrow. Listen, everybody.”

CHAPTER IV

EVE OF ROMANI

NEXT morning the 15th Royal West Essex were marching in column-of-route back to the Canal; while behind them, at Weymann's Dump, now dismantled and tumbled over the sand, the sweating, cursing, sacrilegious fatigue parties loaded up the pack-mules in a heat like the heat from furnace doors. All and everything were for Kantara.

From the minute the Turk said "Check!" to Kantara, that little bridge-head on the Asiatic side of the Canal had become the hub of Egypt's defences. The shock at Kantara, like an earthquake shock, had sent its message radiating over the Mediterranean world. It was at once felt at Zeitoun, near Cairo, in whose training camps and schools every man of the Sinai Divisions received orders to rejoin his unit without delay; it was felt at Sidi Bishr, near Alexandria, in whose holiday camps all resting troops heard with dismay that their rest was curtailed and they must return immediately; it was felt on the quays of Egypt, where individual officers and drafts of men awaiting transport to take them on leave to England, swore bitterly when told that their leave was cancelled and their return ordered; it was felt at Marseilles where bronzed and happy soldiers of the Egyptian Expeditionary Force, disembarking to journey across France to England, had to execute an about-turn and take ship for the posts they had left; and it was felt in the ubiquitous Navy, whose ships loomed up in those waters of the Mediterranean that bathe the northern coast of Sinai, and there stood by, against the day when they would be required to shell the communications of the Turk.

And between Leigh Post and the Canal a column of khaki men went washing through the soft sand.

With it, at the head of one of its companies, went Captain Scrase and Lieut. O'Grogan, ploughing and stumbling side

by side. Scrase had given his mount to his groom to ride, professing no reason; but Tony had guessed the reason: Scrase had decided that, if he must order his men to forge through hot sand under an Egyptian sun, so that each man trod in the sweat of his fellows ahead, then he must prove to them from in front that it could be done. Tony even charged him with it, adding picturesquely, "We're laying the dust for them with our own sweat;" to which Scrase instantly mumbled a demurrer: "I'd as soon march as ride," he said.

In Tony, despite the glare aching across his forehead, and the sweat saturating his helmet, there was an eagerness, an impatience, which excited a curious smarting in his throat. It sprang first from that irrational delight in the sheer fact of war which he had discovered in himself; and secondly from the swelling thought, "Now, *now*, is my chance." In a day or two, after he had performed some magnificent heroism in the battle, he would have exchanged the murmurs of disapproval for a chorus of praise. And thereafter all would be well, for among these unimaginative, sheep-like public-schoolboys the legend of his bravery would root as toughly as the legend of his "cold feet." Oh, he might be killed in the effort, of course, but what of that? Strange, bewilderingly strange, that so small a matter as the praise or blame of his neighbours should drive him more powerfully than the instinct for life itself!

Such was Tony's very secret thought, under a helmet limp with sweat: what was Scrase's? From the moment the alarm had sounded there had been nothing in Scrase to hint that an obsession of his own had leapt to its mastery, except a tendency to raise thoughtful eyebrows and to lapse into long silences during which he swallowed intermittently. His handling of the company and all his movements were prompt and efficient. He laughed often—but was there not at times a hitch, a gulp in his laughter?

Behind with their platoons came Moulden, Childe Harold and Aylwin, the two young ones marching to their first battle. One shuddered to contemplate what manner of authority on battles Aylwin would become, if he survived.

In front, at the head of A Company, rode Hughes Anson. He rode; he did not march with his men like Scrase. "Not I," he had declared. "Some bright spark said that the man was a public benefactor who made two blades of grass grow instead of one; but the lad for my money is the lad who

arranges that only one man shall be tired instead of two." And at that he put his foot in his stirrup and swung aloft on his big bay mare, with a word of praise for Allah.

And at the head of the whole column rode Colonel Tappiter, all his natural kindliness shut out of sight behind his iron Bismarck jaw and his steeled Ludendorff eyes. It was a theory of Scrase's that the Colonel's very fine jaw, of which he could only be proud, was the source of all his attempted Prussianism, but whether such was the case or not, beyond doubt he was resolving now that his battalion should go into battle as a battalion ought to go: a single furious instrument, whose component men reckoned themselves nothing and the instrument everything. Why be a soldier at all if you held that anything less than this was the truth about a battalion?

Yes, why?

On the far side of the Canal a train should have been waiting to rush them northward to Kantara; but there was no train in sight when they arrived; only the railway line, a Railway Transport Officer and the desert.

The Colonel cursed the R.T.O., and the R.T.O. submitted deferentially that there was congestion up north in the vicinity of Kantara, and he could not promise a train for hours—if at all, that day.

So the Colonel turned about and wrathfully permitted the men to bathe when the sun had mellowed. During that bathe and afterwards when the men were lolling on the bank, huge black troopships came down the Canal, all packed with yellow soldiers; one after another they came, their bows to the south, heading for India and Mesopotamia. And an imbecile humour played between the Canal banks and the deck rails.

"'Oo are you?" came a voice from the bank.

"The Cheshires, begorra."

"Send us some cheese, then."

"Why, who are you?" demanded the ship.

"Alexander's Rag-time Band!"

"Are you fighting anyone?"

"Nah!" The bank denied it. "We're consumptives taking a fresh-air cure. Where are you going in that tub?"

"Blighty!" came the unhesitating response; which was not without its pathos, for the ship's bows were turned away from England.

"Gahn! Abaht turn then!—" here were the unmistakable accents of Joe Wylie—"You're on the wrong road. . . . Well, goo'bye. 'Ope it keeps fine for yer."

"Goo'bye. Are we down-hearted?"

"Not 'arf!" This was Art Webster's yell; for where Joe Wylie was, there was Art Webster.

Then came another transport on whose 1st Class deck was a ravishing cluster of sisters in grey and red.

"Ow!" shouted Joe. "Ow, I say! Look at the s'nice s'nurses!" And to the men aboard he called, "Hi! 'oo are you? Are you the latest war-babies from England?"

"Aye, that's about it. What are you doing there?"

"We're the Royal West Essex. We're the boys that matter."

"Well, don't you know there's a war on?"

"Gahn! We were at war before you were born. Who are you?"

"Worcesters and Warwicks."

"Oh, you're no good. Where are you going?"

"Mespot."

"You'll get hell there all right. Goo'bye."

"Cheerio, chum."

"Chin chin."

In the passage of the ships Tony found much to stir him. Here were the lines of two very different battles crossing each other in an Eastern desert, and at the point of contact rose the voice of London—of Manchester—of Birmingham; a voice no different to-day from what it was two years ago, in 1914; no different here from what it was in the Mile End Road; facetious, unperturbed, the voice of a people who were still content after two years of disaster and deadlock to cruise about the seas—which of course belonged to them by prescriptive right—in pursuit of some sort of victory, somewhere and someday—and taking their football with them.

"By gosh!" he thought, in a sudden vivid appreciation. "I'm with 'em all the way. I'm with 'em to the end."

The train came at dawn, and rolled away with them northward. Except for the belt of palm trees with which the Sweet Water Canal clothed its banks, and except for infrequent clusters of Arab mud huts, the desert stretched to the horizon left and right of the rails. And the train ambled on, and evening came down upon the whole vast area, inundating it with the hues of sunset. Blue darkness ousted all these

colours, and the train slipped in behind the square, white buildings of Ismailia; and thence, in the thickening night, bowled on to El Ferdan.

At El Ferdan the battalion detrained and unloaded. Tony dossed down on a stack of baggage, but his sleep was uneasy: all night the movements of troops disturbed him; he heard horses trotting, and camels padding with bells a-tinkle, and voices shouting commands. Telephones buzzed and dispatch riders panted away. The 16th Lancashires passed: he knew from their voices that they had marched on sudden orders from Ismailia and were going on through the night to Kantara. And the 14th Fusiliers went by, having left their tents standing—so they shouted to someone—for by dawn they must be at Kantara. Once in the night there came from behind him a comment on all this movement—Art Webster's voice: "Christ! El Ferdan's 'ell-fer-leather, ain't it?"

Next day, July the 21st, some copies of the local paper, *The Egyptian Mail*, circulated speedily among the officers and the men. Well they might, for in this paper the news was given to the world: a heavy-type headline streamed across the whole of the front page, "Turkish Division Approaching the Canal." Truly there was something stimulating to the soldiers in that headline. It gave reality and immediacy to the approaching fight: the simpler of them seemed to realize for the first time what was happening; and they were satisfied enough.

That day the remaining battalions of the Royal West Essex Brigade concentrated with the 15th; and at midnight, in complete darkness, a column of four thousand men began its twelve-mile march to Kantara. It was still dark when, halting by Kantara's pontoon bridge, the men for the most part lay down on the bank to contrive some sleep. At sunrise the pontoon bridge was swung across the Canal; and with whistling and singing and mild cursing, the Brigade clattered over its woodwork and found itself on a white road between unnumbered tents and hangars. It was Kantara.

Here once more they must halt and wait. But it was a rare good wait, this one, brimming with talk and interest. All day long battalion after battalion, in full fighting kit, marched up the military road and added their mass to the great concentration of troops that was packing the threatened position. Units that the Essex never knew to be in Egypt converged

upon the pontoon bridge of Kantara and came swinging along, one behind the other, to allotted positions on the Asiatic side of the Canal. Aeroplanes from all the flights and squadrons, dispersed along the Canal, came bearing in, like homing pigeons, to reinforce Kantara's aerodrome. Ambulance wagons purred away—to a cheer—going as far as the road would take them, to meet the incoming casualties; and all knew then that the cavalry must be in effective contact with the enemy. Towards evening a throb as of distant howitzers troubled the air.

At dark the brigade dragged itself to its feet and marched but a little way into the open desert, where the serpentine column broke up into constituent parts, and each battalion went off at an angle to its appointed resting-place and came to a halt as a single square of men. Arms were piled, packs and equipment doffed, and perspiring foreheads wiped. Here they were to sleep, by the piled arms. The smoking field kitchens fed the 15th with tea and stew, and Quartermaster Weymann distributed his jam and fresh bread.

“A real Blighty meal, ain't it?” said a grateful soldier.

Then by the light of its cigarettes the battalion lay down and sang a song or two, before allowing the silence of the wilderness to wrap it in sleep.

A wonderful thing, a thousand men asleep together. The stars looked down upon the little pyramids of their piled arms, arrayed in parallel straight lines, and upon the solitary figures of the sentries, who alone stood upright with shining bayonets, or abruptly sloped arms, and moved to and fro.

And all this while, with the waning of a moon that hung in the sky like the crescent of Islam, the great Fast of Ramadan was drawing to its close. What of it? Only that the Faithful, confident of Allah's propitiation by their month of ascetic piety, would wait for the death of the moon and then smite the enemies of the Prophet with the virtues of the Fast of Ramadan.

Dawn, and orders for the brigade to proceed at once to Hill 40, a post many miles in the desert, and lying south of the threatened railhead of Romani.

A drink of tea from the cookers, and the column reformed and took the white military road that lay like a ribbon on the undulating yellow sand. The sun came up, with majestic indifference, and poured upon them such a heat as they had never before known—or so it seemed to them that day. The road scorched and drove its heat through the heavy soles of their army boots. Panting, the men toiled forward with jaws drooping and the white dust caking on lips and gums and teeth. All singing died out and joking ceased; and men had scarcely heart to mutter their curses. From the battalion in front, the 14th, the weaker men, weighted with their packs and rifles and ammunition, began to fall by the way. Phew! 'Fore Heaven!

The spirit of the 15th was better. It held. Its long column rumbled with seditious murmurings, but it jogged on, intact—possibly because it had Colonel Tappiter in front and Joe Wylie somewhere behind. The one of these was astringent and the other laxative; and a happy alternation or blending of these remedies, we suppose, can make for equilibrium; so the 15th jogged on, with never a man—no, not the profanest—falling out.

Joe, with his varicose vein, limping forward on bandy legs at the tail of C Company—his long nose and his loose moustache greyed with dust—Joe was the only one now to raise his voice in ribaldry. And it was not his words that amused his comrades so much as the fact that old Joe's voice had uttered them and his delighted laugh had followed them. There seemed no doubt that a gangrene had attacked the 14th in front, for it was dropping its men behind as rapidly as a torn sack will drop its knobs of coal; which provided Joe with the chance for an unspeakable comment in which the word "No. 9" and a medical term for visceral looseness were the fine point for humour. This pleasantry was passed along the line of the 15th, as it plodded grimly on; and the 15th grunted a laugh and stumbled on. They passed a group of six men of the 14th who had fallen out and were sitting down in the desert scrub; and Joe chaffed them: "Git yer blankets aht, me lads; git dahn to it. Revally at 5.30 in the morning." They passed another group, and Joe cried: "Gaw! look at that little lot! Got yer cards, mates? You've a four there, ain't yer? . . . And 'ere's some more! Shall we be sendin' the car for yer?" and for this patter he was consigned to hell

by the dispirited backsliders, but it drew from the stickers, as they jogged on, their rumbles of laughter, and they found strength to—jog on.

“Bungay,” said Kit Scrase to Tony beside him.

“Yes?” inquired Tony.

“Have you ever considered, Bungay, what the Funny Man of a regiment is worth to the country?”

“No,” answered Tony, “but we had just such another in the Lancashires.”

“Well, Kipling said some time ago that the soul of a battalion resided in its band. I should like to argue it out with him, if you can arrange a meeting. I’ve a strong suspicion that it’s in the keeping of the Funny Man.”

Perhaps it is. When at the half-hours and the clock-hours the column “fell out on the right of the road” for its few minutes’ rest, and the flesh of men’s knees, exposed by the drawn-up shorts, began to sting and inflame in the sun, Joe Wylie suddenly shouted, “S’tuth! I can smell me knees cooking. Reminds me of me Sunday dinners at ’ome.” When, the battalion marching again, Scrase walked up and down his company to encourage the men to endure, Joe called to him, “Not more than another eighty miles, is it, sir? Nah, barely that, is it, sir?” and Kit laughed and said, “Well, perhaps a *little* more, Wylie. Say eighty-five.” “Yurse,” accepted Joe. “I see, sir. I see. Nothing to speak of.” And when Scrase towards the end of the day had assured them that Hill 40 was just over the next skyline, and when the company had topped that skyline and discovered that there was yet another far distant one to be reached, then there was a silence broken only by maledictions, till suddenly Joe uplifted his voice again, “Cheer up, me lucky lads. Only sixteen more skylines!” and the silence trembled into a wave of laughter, and the exhausted foot-sore men staggered on.

And all the day Colonel Tappiter cantered up and down his battalion that he might bark at the incipient loiterers like a sheepdog. He had no word of encouragement for the stickers: they were but doing their job; and he paid them the tribute of his silence; but the grouzers, the murmurers—if he but heard them, he charged up to revile them, even as Moses reviled his command when they murmured in these places. Fred Roberts came under his blast: at about the sixth hour Fred suddenly stated that it was not in him to march another yard, but he

did not immediately fall out, contenting himself with a muttered repetition of his interesting pronouncement next time the Colonel rode by. Straight-about came the Colonel's horse and danced an alarming Charleston at Fred Roberts' side. "Fall out then!" roared the Colonel. "*Fall out if you want to*, but I promise you I'll send nothing and no one to fetch you in. You can lie here and rot if you like, or be captured by the Turks. You'll be as much good to them as you are to us. This battalion's no use for malingerers." And he clattered away.

"'E seems vexed," said the voice of Joe Wylie.

The Colonel out of sight, Fred Roberts reminded his hearers that commanding officers had been shot in the back before now, and that he didn't care how soon the Germans finished off the British Empire and won the ruddy war, because after it there'd be a ruddy revolution which would have all his support, Englishmen not being niggers or Germans to fall for this sort of thing; which observations delivered, he stumbled on, the sadness and the bewilderment fixed in his patient London face.

"Now *he's* vexed too," sighed Joe Wylie.

The 15th was still at full strength when, beneath a falling sun, the Brigade marched on to its camping ground at Hill 40. But the battalion in front had dropped 250 of its 900 men—which was a record, and some days later a Colonel went home to England. The 15th were kept on parade for a few minutes longer than the other battalions, which was matter for profanity, till the Brigadier rode up and congratulated them, declaring that they had been an example and an inspiration to the whole brigade. After that they dismissed, mumbling a ridicule of "that old b——'s eyewash;" but the bitterness in their hearts against Colonel Tappiter was melting away.

There was a halt of some days at Hill 40, because the Turks were coming very slowly over the heavy sands of Sinai. Rumour had it that they were dragging their guns along with teams of oxen, while gangs of coolies ran ahead to lay timber planks beneath the wheels as the guns advanced. If so, they must be coming at a pace something less than a funeral's, and might be in sight, so Art Webster surmised, the week before Christmas.

At Hill 40 "Little Willie" Sparrow bade the regiment

good-bye, not without embarrassment, and left them. Two years he had marched and fought and endured with them, and he was still only seventeen years old. He had a right to go home, and had claimed his right. Eight weeks before, when he was wretched with sand-fever at Leigh Post, he had walked unhappily into the Orderly Room and reported his true age and asked if he might go home. His mother was ill, he said, and he was her sole support, and he would come out again—he would really—when he was of service age. He had stuck it out, he added, for two years. . . . But if they couldn't manage this for him, it didn't matter, thanks very much. . . . The Orderly Room had no course but to forward his application, and now his answer was come. Now on the very eve of a battle.

Things happened like that in the army, his officer, Lieut. O'Grogan told him; and this officer knew it only too well. Perhaps Tony was a little surprised, when the boy came to say his farewells, to observe how much less sharp was young Sparrow's worry over this most inopportune recall than his own had been when a like mischance befell him. There was anxiety in Willie's manner, but it was submerged beneath his joy and excitement at the thought of his home and his Southend pavements, his mother and his girl. Natural, no doubt: a stray bullet like this must injure an officer far more seriously than a humble private.

"I could wish it had come at any other time," said Willie, "but that's not my fault, is it, sir?"

"Certainly not."

"I think the men'll understand that, don't you, sir?"

"They will if they're not imbeciles."

"Yes, but they *are* imbeciles sometimes, aren't they?" said Willie, smiling. "They'd rather believe the nasty thing than the sensible one."

Tony, treasuring his high estimate of the men, hated to have it shaken; even though—

"If that's so," he argued, "they don't do it out of malice, but because they like a spicy story."

"Yes, but it's rather bad luck," grinned Willie, "on him who happens to be the subject of the story——"

"And served up with the spice! It is," Tony admitted; quickly he changed his argument. "And then again, you must remember that it's the only way they have, poor fools, of expressing their loyalty."

"How do you mean, sir?"

"I mean: they won't express aloud their determination to stick out this little trouble—which simply isn't done, you know—so they do it by accusing others of malingering. A very curious race of men! Very."

"But will they say that of me, sir?"

"No, no," Tony lied promptly. "Your position's rather exceptional."

"Well, good-bye, sir; and thanks most awfully for all your kindness."

"Good-bye, Willie."

"But I shall see you again, sir. I'm coming back one day. I promised *that*."

"*Saïda, Willie. Salaam aleykum.*"

On the third day of their halt the 15th was paraded to hear an address from its Colonel. Colonel Tappiter sat his caracol-ing horse in front of them, and struggled alternately with that fiery brute and with his own inarticulateness.

"It's possible, men," he shouted, "that within forty-eight hours we shall be—er—in conflict with the Turk, and I'm sure that by fighting like the devil you'll—you'll—you'll do damn well. The 15th, confound it, made a bit of a name on the Peninsula, and now we have a chance of winning new—'new laurels,' I think the phrase goes—and, dammit, we'll do it. Talking about the Peninsula, nothing can alter the fact that the Turk thinks he beat us there, fair and square. Well, I've not much use for his thinking that, and I don't expect you have, either. God, no! In short—in fact—we owe him one, and he's going to get it this time, fair and square. I can't tell you—damn you, you brute" (this to the horse), "*stand*, will you?—I can't tell you all the strategy of this battle, but take my word for it, there's a trap waiting for the Turks and they're going to walk into it, fair and square—God! that man two from the left! don't you know how to stand properly at ease, man; pull your knee in! What the devil do you think this is? A Bible Class?—The Turks'll walk into it, and we shall collect them in their thousands—not a doubt of it! And in that way we shall remove all danger to the Canal for a long time to come. Then we shall probably take the initiative—*stand*, you brute—and begin an advance into the Holy Land, which ought to be damn interesting. Talking about the Canal, you saw, didn't you? our ships going down it to India

and Mesopot, and you'll see why we can't have the Turk sitting across it. . . . You may have to wait a bit here ; but whether you're waiting or whether you're marching, or whether you're giving the Turk what-for, you are already taking your part in the Battle of Romani. You see ? It's more or less begun, you see, and already you have your place—just here—in the disposition of forces that's arranged to—er—to—er—to win it. . . . Well, I think that's all. . . . Oh no ! Bye the bye, you've all heard of the good show put up by British troops in this great Somme business in France—including, mind you, several Essex Battalions—and God in heaven ! it's up to us not to fall behind their standard. . . . Surely ! . . . Oh, yes, I may as well tell you that you are to be made into a Flying Column, which will probably mean two bloody awful hardships for you—more marches like your last, and damn little water. Thank God I shan't have to walk across the desert, but then I'm much older than you—for Christ's sake stand *still* ” (for such a sake the horse obeyed and stood perfectly still)—“ but I'll take on the thirst, same as any of you, and—er—well, I feel sure the 15th will set an example to the brigade as you did the other day. Yes, surely. On the march, I mean.—Dammit, I think that'll do, won't it ? ” This last remark was addressed in a lower voice to the Adjutant at his side, who nodded his verdict that it would do.

After this speech the battalion adjourned for breakfast ; and the officers lifted up mugs of tea and toasted, “ The Day ! Der Tag ! Der Tag ! *Bow-wow* . ”

The forty-eight hours passed, and many more, during which they weeded out the unfit men, reduced their kit, and dressed for their character as a Flying Column. Their iron rations were overhauled, and their first field dressings ; and they were given each man a bottle of water purifiers. The water-bottles were to be kept full, and anyone drinking from them without orders would be immediately put under arrest.

And every night they rehearsed the Flying Column.

At Hill 40 there was trouble with Padre Quickshaw. Padre Quickshaw was now Senior Chaplain of the whole Division, but he had refused to live as far back as Divisional Headquarters, and was still attached to the brigade to which he had

ministered rebuke for so long. He was still the "temporary" secretary of B.H.Q. mess who purposed to resign to-morrow—as he had been any time in the last two years. During the six months that B.H.Q. had sat on the Canal banks he might often have been seen walking among its tents in a cracked pith helmet and a crumpled black cassock with the M.C. ribbon on its breast; but now that they had taken to the road again the cassock was folded up and he was usually discovered in a pair of tommy's shorts, a pale yellow shirt void of any badges of rank, and the cracked helmet. Like Scrase, he had trudged every step of the way in the recent marches, giving his horse to his groom. Therefore it was hardly to be expected that he would submit to what happened now.

What happened now was this: on the establishment of the Flying Columns, in view of the fact that every gallon of water had to be carefully considered, an order was issued that chaplains must not accompany their units, but must remain behind on the Dumps.

Did you ever hear the like? Quickshaw, his lips spluttering acerbity and his resentful eyes starting out of his head, met the insolent order with such sedition and rebellion as only he could have initiated without being promptly cashiered. Roughly it may be said that he turned the back of his cassock upon the approaching enemy and his face to Divisional Headquarters in the rear, and opened three concurrent campaigns in that direction: the first an Indignation Campaign, in which he demanded if anyone thought the fifteen padres of the division had left their parishes at home to come out and sit on the men's unwanted socks and pants, and whether they were to be held as less worth their water than the meanest mule; the second a Pathos Campaign, in which he offered their services as stretcher-bearers—or as batmen to their colonels—batmen, he added caustically, who would bumsuck with the best; and the third a Flat Defiance Campaign, in which he announced that they would go with their men, with or without permission. All these offensives were stubbornly repulsed at Headquarters with the reply that the establishment of the Flying Columns was final, and if chaplains accompanied them they would be deprived of such carnal things as water and meat, which possibly the Lord would provide. To this Quickshaw retorted, with more spirit than sense, that it took two parties to a contract to say whether it was final, and that the Lord for the moment wasn't in this—

and forthwith he dispatched a clear-line wire to the Principal Chaplain at G.H.Q.—as to a person of greater objective reality, in the eyes of an army, than the Deity—requesting him to lay the whole case before the Commander-in-Chief. Whether it was the outcome of this wire or not, none knew, but a supplementary order announced that one chaplain only should accompany the division and he the senior of them. This leaving fourteen out in the cold, and giving, moreover, an unfair advantage to the C. of E., Quickshaw nobly refused to accept it, and, after inquiring of Division when they would realize that there were denominational differences among the men, sat down to pen his request that, since August the 4th was at hand and his second year completed, he might be at once relieved of his commission and allowed to return to England. But before it was dispatched G.H.Q. surrendered, and all the chaplains were ordered—actually *ordered*—to proceed with their units. And under Quickshaw's instructions they interpreted this order in its widest sense, taking with them their servants and grooms and horses, and—so Authority affirmed, giving a last fatuous thrust—a gravely excessive kit.

In the opening days of August, Hill 40 learned that the first phase of the battle had resulted in the retreat of the Australian Light Horse before the enemy, who was already south and west of Romani.

A retreat, ye gods!—or was it (as Aylwin held—nay, knew) the trap? Trap or disaster, on Friday, August the 4th, the second anniversary of Britain's declaration of war, after a morning during which the booming of artillery had been rolling over the sand dunes, the Essex Brigade received its orders to put itself in readiness to march.

CHAPTER V

BATTLE OF ROMANI

TONY had seen no parade quite like this one : a brigade falling in to march straight into battle ; every man with a supply of firewood strapped on his pack and the knowledge in his face that he would not return till after the fight, if he returned at all.

With the 15th occupying the privileged position at the head of the column, the brigade started to plough through the sands. They were heading for Gilban, a post on the railway where they were to encamp for the night ; and as the miles swung under their feet, many isolated troopers of the cavalry passed them, wandering in from the front. Mischievously these fellows assured them that the Australian Light Horse were *mafish* (finished) and that the Romani railhead had been blown to glory by German bombs. And the men, just as they were the chief of grousers, so they enjoyed more than most things the possession of an ugly rumour. Soon the fate of the Light Horse, who had been cut up and annihilated, and the fate of Romani, which had been blown off the map, ran merrily down the column, prompting the satirists to express a hope that it would keep fine for them when they were being marched to the Turkish prisons at Damascus.

"Do they take us in chains ?" shouted Joe Wylie. "Do they now ?"

The humour of the situation put them in the best of spirits ; and through the darkness they pursued their march towards the Terrible Turk with songs and whistling. Not "Rule, Britannia" ; not any song of patriotism ; and certainly not "Tipperary," which had been discarded immediately the newspapers made it into the Soldiers' Song ; none of these did they sing ; but in high chorus they invited someone to wash them in the water in which he washed his dirty daughter, that they

might be whiter than the whitewash on the wall ; or they proclaimed that they all lived at No. 24, and at No. 24 there was a knocker on the door ; or they announced to the stragglers of Gilban that they were the New York swells, and they were respected wherever they might go. The only ditty at all bearing upon the war that they sang that night was " Keep the home fires burning till the boys come home."

At Gilban the scrub was so plentiful that it gave the desert by starlight the appearance of an English gorse-common. Through the scrub, straight as a latitudinal line, ran the railway to Romani. Tents left empty by those who had gone forward stood beside the railway ; and the men who handed them over to the new-comers warned them to keep the flaps down because the place was infested with " snakes, spiders, scorpions, crabs, jellyfish and all sorts of other anny-miles." The tired marchers recked little of these things, and unrolled their blankets and " got down to it." It was a night of strange lights on the Romani front, and heavy firing, the guns increasing in intensity as the dawn broke.

The dawn brought the stunning blow to Tony. There went forth an order, past understanding by junior officers, that the four battalions of the brigade were to advance at once to the scene of the fighting, but each battalion only three companies strong ; its fourth company was to remain at Gilban ; and Colonel Tappiter ordained that C Company should be the one to stay behind.

There could be no protesting ; no seeking explanation from Colonel or Adjutant. All was hurried movement and shouted commands ; and before Scrase and the others could fully realize that they had been denied the battle, the brigade had crowded into trains and rolled away.

" Cheated ! " The word leapt to Tony's lips as he stood in the scrub and listened to the diminuendo of the trains. And the murmur of the battle beat along the horizon, in front of the dying rumble !

Damnation ! was there ever such accursed luck ? The stars in their courses . . . Gone now his chance to set up before the eyes of his brigade the real Lieut. O'Grogan, the fearless Lieut. O'Grogan . . . Yes, it was gone ; for the battle would finish to-day : the retreat of the British had been nothing more than the recoil of a wave which was now rolling forward in a tidal success ; it had lured the enemy from his wells, involved

him hopelessly in the sand dunes and was now surrounding him. And here stood Tony, dropped like the excess baggage, miles behind the range of fire.

"They also serve who only stand and wait."

Yes, but no honour theirs, in the common mind. And it was the common mind that had wounded him and now occupied all his thoughts. Why, dammit, his lagging here, though it was only in obedience to orders, could probably be used by the evil-minded to underline the tale of his "cold feet." Says someone, but only in joke: "O'Grogan, I see, contrived to dodge the guns again," and the evil-minded pass on the word, but in their different voice. Thus it was done in the army.

Well, one could only laugh . . . and wait. . . . He mooned out into the desert, his head down; and gradually the sands beneath his eyes unveiled to him their wonderful interest, and he achieved for a while the detachment of a student. What a manuscript were these sands, thickly written over with the scholarship of the desert! He had thought of the desert as a dead world, and here, in a hundred tiny alphabets, ran the story that it was alive with life. Life rioted upon it—at least where the scrub abounded. There wriggled a long line—the track of a snake. There, in those pock-marks, the feet of a jerboa had pressed. Here in this long stretch of Chinese writing the beetle had gone its way; and here in this chain of broad arrows, a bird had hopped. That zigzag line with dots accompanying it was the trail of a lizard leading to yonder little hole; this half-foot, half-claw mark was the impress of a chameleon—yes, there was the chameleon himself, yellow as he walked the sand and green as he climbed the scrub.

And everywhere this screed of nature was overlaid with the writing of war; with its footprints of men marching four abreast, its hoof-marks of trekking cavalry, its saucer-holes shaped by the padding transport camels, and its deeper cavities opened by the high-legged trotting camels of the Bikanir Corps. Pooh! What were these man-made prints but phenomena for the naturalist; in what were they different from the prints of the smaller fighting animals? Syrian humans, Assyrian, Chaldean, Greek, Roman, French, British had tramped their record on these sands, and imagined they were writing imperial history! Funny little squabbling ants! The next high wind had blown their record away, and the page was clean again for their brethren, the snake, the jerboa and the beetle.

And shells. There were lovely little sea-shells everywhere. Now how did sea-shells get here? Were they blown up by the wind from the Mediterranean seaboard? Or had they lain here for countless ages since the water receded from these sands and an ocean bed became a desert? Were they thousands of years older than the pompous histories of man? This Great War, what was it when set within the infinite stretches of time? Hardly to be observed. And if that were the size of the war, what was the size of his private trouble?

And yet—there was no denying it, even in this hour of detachment—it was his master-thought. Oh, in the name of sense, how could he be so paltry as to worry about the impression his passing had left in the minds of a few unintelligent men? He *didn't* worry. . . . Ah, but he did, though. . . . His intellect might see the absurdity of it, but what would you?—when had intellect a dog's chance of defeating emotion? Not yet in him: he had but to recall that men were speaking unkindly of him, and his body shivered.

He returned to Gilban; and here they whispered to him a terrible rumour about A Company and Hughes Anson—a rumour which shamed him utterly for his pre-occupation with himself. They told him also, with happier voices, that the battle was over: the cavalry were pursuing the retreating enemy, and thousands of prisoners, including German officers, and a whole German machine-gun section, and some Bedouin irregular horse, would pass through Gilban within the next hour.

They came; train-loads of them in coal wagons. No sooner was the rumble of a train heard than every man left his tent and rushed to swell the crowd lining the railway. Nearly all the trains carried wounded, the earlier bringing the less serious casualties, the later the stretcher cases. And here was the wagon that held the German machine-gunners. "Come and see the bloody Boches!" went the cry; and the men came and stared—they were excellent at staring—stared at the faired-skinned Teutons seated among the brown Anatolian Turks. "Fine b——s, aren't they?" said they. The Turks begged in dumb show for cigarettes, and most of the tommies were quick to supply them; others less chivalrous would only barter a cigarette for a badge or coin. The Germans, too proud to ask for favours, sat there silently, but sometimes the tommies offered them their cigarettes—a trifle diffidently, such fine fellows were the Boches

—and then the Germans took them and raised their caps in salute. After which, to the general verdict, there was added a rider, “Not bad b——s, these Fritzes.” The engine whistled; the train jerked and started amid cries to the Turks of “Goo’-bye, Johnee,” “Bye-bye, Abdul, mind tha be good,” “Write and let us know how you get on,” “*Saïda*, Johnny.”

The whole scene had been most like a meeting between the representatives of two friendly nations who were playing at war with each other; or, say, of two rival football teams fraternizing at half-time.

Just before dark, when he was returning from another saunter in the desert, Tony was alarmed to see a great activity in the camp: tent-striking, packing, and fatigues carrying baggage. He ran forward and learned that they were to entrain at nine o’clock that night. By nine o’clock they stood ready with everything on their backs, except the blankets and stores, which waited on the side of the railway line.

The train arrived at nine o’clock the next morning. Packed by forties in the trucks, they were rushed to Pelusium, which was the last “station” before the railhead at Romani. And here C Company found its battalion returned from the battle. What news? How had they fared?

Oh, not so bad: nothing to write ’ome about; there’d bin a bit of a scrap in which A Company, as usual, had collared the best of it. The other companies had simply chased the enemy, firing at their backsides and potting ’em off, as they ran.

Then it wasn’t true—that rumour they had heard about A Company?

God, no! A Company had simply charged a rear-guard which was firing from the crest of a sand dune. Captain Hughes Anson (added the men, who always loved a picturesque story) had led ’em like a good ’un: he had taken a rifle and a bayonet same as any of the boys and rushed up the sand dune faster than they could follow him, shouting all the Arabic words he could think of: “Allah, Allah, Allah, imshi, igri, mafish, *saïda*, bakshish!” And on top of the dune he had yelled out the cries of the Cairo buggy drivers: “Oah Ya Riglak—Oah Ya Minak—Oah Ya Bint”—“Look out, O Thou on the right! Look out, O Thou on the left! Look out,

O Woman!" Gaw! he had been a fair treat. The Turks on the hill-top had surrendered after a very little bayoneting, chucking up their hands and shouting, "Turk feenish, German bad:" so A Company had patted 'em on the back for speaking so sensible and taken 'em all prisoners.

Many casualties in the battalion?

Wur!, no—not too bad. About thirty killed, including Mr. Oakley and Company Sergeant-Major Boxgrove; and about a hundred wounded. Mostly A Company.

Colonel all right?

Oh, the Colonel—why the old copulator's acting Brigadier now! Yes, the old Brigadier went down with gypsy-tummy, and the Colonel took over; and the first thing he done was to send the 14th, the lads who had failed so badly on the march, into a tough piece of fighting that they might git proud o' themselves again—not a bad idea, neither—and when the Turks bunked from their Katir Oasis, he gave the 14th the honour of entering it first. . . . But look 'ere—this with significant nods—there'd bin something in that yarn about the kevelry being cut up, but seems it was a long time ago; there was no doubt that a whole squadron of the Rutland Yeomanry had been completely surrounded and cut to pieces. *I'mmm!* that was true enough, take their word for it. These 'ere Anatolian Turks weren't the gen'l'men that the Gallipoli Turks had been. Savage brutes, some of 'em.

The next morning the companies from Gilban, because they were rested companies, were told off to march through the noon-day heat to the scene of the fight. They were to take pack mules and sacks for collecting the enemy's discarded rifles, and shovels for burying his dead. They had just formed up and were about to move when all heads were swung around by that stirring noise, a kettledrum thunder on the earth's surface, which means a single galloping horse. They saw a mounted man racing towards them, a cloud of sand his companion; he came like a dust-devil driven by an eddy of wind. The horse's head was tossing magnificently, either in joyous excitement or in fury with a rider whose rein was hard on his mouth. They soon knew that the latter was the reason; and laughter crackled along the column, to be instantly suppressed. For this irrupting visitor was no other than Padre Quickshaw, a little man on an enormous chestnut gelding, and bumping like a pea on an elephant's back.

"Charlie Chaplain's Mounted Infantry," mumbled Art Webster under his breath.

Quickshaw slid down the side elevation of his horse, gave it to a man to hold, and ran after the column in the tumbling sand; for the column had started, and moved quite a little way, before the business of arresting his horse and getting himself clear of it had been finally compassed. Breathless and indignant, and with his helmet falling to the nape of his neck, he arrived at the side of Scrase and Tony. But his indignation far exceeded his breathlessness, and, trudging along, he poured out a vituperation of Brigade Headquarters which, in its usual style, had remembered picks and shovels for burying the dead but forgotten the chaplain.

"I'm just about fed up with it," he spat. "I can't make out whether they take us seriously or not, and if they don't, what the blazes are we here for? When I heard what they were doing I told 'em a home truth or two. And your Colonel Tappiter's no better than the old brigadier, who was an ass if ever there was one—he said, 'Well, you know the position, padre: in a fighting unit the M.O.'s a necessary evil but the padre's an unnecessary evil, *bee, bee,*'—the fool!—so I said that that might be his view, and the view of every commanding officer in the army, but it didn't happen to be the War Office's view—the War Office had ordered us to come; and then they tried to sneak out of it by saying that it was Turks you were burying, not Christians; but I told 'em that that was a lie because I'd heard the Brigade Major tell the Staff Captain that although they tried to get in all the British bodies, there were still a few men missing——"

"Who's missing?" asked Tony sharply.

"I don't know. I didn't stop to inquire. I went out and took the Signal Officer's horse, as my own's gone lame——"

"One or two of A Company's missing," supplied Scrase.

"—yes," Quickshaw spurted, "and as they'll be pretty rotten by this time, we're to bury them where they lie. So I went out and took the Signal Officer's horse—damned ferocious brute with a mouth like iron—and rode out to you; and the last I saw of Brigade Headquarters was the Staff Captain standing at his tent and screaming at me not to gallop a horse through the sand, while that fathead of a Brigade Major stood there laughing. I'm *for* it, when I get back. But I couldn't help it; I tried to bring the brute down to a canter, but he's got nothing in him

between a walk and a gallop. Besides, *I can't ride*. I knew nothing about a horse before I joined the army. And in any case, if I've broken his wind—and he sounds like it, I must say—it's their fault—their fault every time."

Marching along—Scrase, Tony and Quickshaw—they found it easy to understand why this northern strip of the Sinai peninsula had been the natural route for the Ancients between the Holy Land and Egypt. The desert was far more undulating here than in the southern regions, and some of the depressions dipped deep enough for moisture, lurking in their bottoms, to provide springs of brackish water and small groves of palm trees, heavy with yellow clusters of dates. They passed three such oases as they forced their feet through the yellow sand.

Behind them dragged the men—grousing. The voice of that best of grousters, Fred Roberts, could be heard burbling on and on, in a very salt stream. "We're scavengers, that's what we are. We're not fighters—don't you believe it, Charlie; it's only a rumour. We're the sanitary b——s. . . . Royal West Essex, mark yer! Royal West Crossing Sweepers's more like it! . . . I say, Charlie, don't you wish you hadn't 'listed in this lousy lot but had joined the army? You've got some nippers, 'aven't you? No? Well, yer lucky. But yer married, aren't yer? Well, if ever you do have a kid—and anything may happen after yer've bin on leave—your nipper'll be arsting you one day, 'Father, what did you do in the Great War?' 'Cleaned the bloody muck off the desert, my child. . . .'"

Soon a stench of putrefaction, by an instant association of ideas, brought the old Peninsula before their eyes; and they knew that they were near the battlefield. A toilsome climb up a steep gradient, and they were halted on the battlefield's rim. It seemed a great circular dyke enclosed by lofty white sand-hills. In its central depth an oasis lay in a dark blob. On the ridges of the nearer hills were the hastily-dug "five-minute trenches," from which the Essex had rained their fire on the Turks. And all the hollow, and all the farther slopes, were littered with rifles, bayonets, pouches, water-bottles, cooking utensils—and men.

The scavenging companies deployed into extended order so as to cover as much as possible of the far-stretching battlefield. In a trice they were nothing more than dotted lines. The lines swept on, picking up all that was of value among the

droppings, and breaking into groups to hollow out graves for the dead. The first of these that Tony saw was a Turk. He was swollen to a great size and burnt in the sun to ebony, the features being nearly all melted away. The huge stiffened body, with its knees drawn up as in suffering and its arms thrown wide as in crucifixion, exuded a moisture that glistened in the sun like varnish. Holding their breath, they dug a hole and with their shovels lifted him into it, not irreverently. And Padre Quickshaw, who had been standing by another little burial group, ran up before they could cover the Turk with sand, and mumbled a Committal over him. He mumbled the Lord's Prayer as well; and the men joined in, slightly lifting their helmets. Following the padre's example, they closed the service with a diffident salute to the fallen foe.

Nearly all the bodies were Turks, but during the day they found one or two British among them.

See, here was a boy of A Company, one of those, we well remember, who shouted on the road to Gilban that they all lived at Number 24, and at Number 24 there was a knocker on the door. . . . Come, padre: another little job for you. His hole is ready.

"And, lumme, here's Corporal Bradley."

"Bradley!"

"Gawd, only yesterday he was sewing his second stripe on his sleeve and swearing that he reckoned nothing to it, but writing home, all the same, to his missus and his old man, to let 'em know about it. Blimey, but he's stiff, ain't he?"

"Well, make his hole wider, and let him lie comfortable. Where's the padre?"

"Who's this feller? Unrecognizable, ain't he? Better just shovel him in——"

"No, you fool, get his identity disc first."

"Gaw!"

"What are you staring at? What does it say?"

"Private E. Botten, R.C. It's Ernie Botten! Poor old Ernie. . . ."

(Once more Tony stood with Honor and Jill and Peggy upon the crown of Wolstonbury, on England's last day of peace, and looked down upon the far-spread carpet of the Sussex Weald, with its villages nestling against their trees—little Twineham there, and Albourne her sister, and Cowfold

over the pastures. . . . Once more he crouched in the ultimate darkness of a mine-sap, a fathom down beneath the feet of the Turks on Gallipoli, and met the voice of Ernie Botten for the first time, not seeing his face or his form, and spoke with him of Twineham, where they would live again one day and remember old times of war. And here lay Ernie Botten. . . . He had worried in his petty way lest Botten should take home to Twineham an unkind story of Lieut. O'Grogan; and here the lad lay. What to think of it all? . . . One didn't think. One just looked down on Ernie Botten lying there.)

"He was an R.C., sir, and I guess he'd have liked his own priest, but Mr. Quickshaw'll do what he can for him. . . ."

"He's all ready for you, Padre."

"Eternal rest grant unto him, O Lord, and let light perpetual shine upon him. May he rest in peace."

"Light perpetual! Gaw, 'e'll get that all right, in this bloody desert."

Up yon ridge, and where are we now? Why, the burings are all done here, and what a crowd of graves! Some blokes 'a' been here before us, and in a deuce of a hurry, it seems; burying 'em as shaller as this! Bobbin' up again, most of 'em. Look, mate—here's a hand comin' up—jest like old Percy on Gallipoli. Now how's that? And all English boys here; them's English helmets and caps lying about—and English newspapers and novels and playing cards. And here's. Player's and Gold Flake cigarette tins—and writing-blocks Funny! who takes newspapers and novels and notepaper with 'em into a scrap? They brown quickly in the sun, these 'ere newspapers. "*Rutland Chronicle*, April 20th, 1916." Blimey, I got it! this is the spot where the Rutland Yeomanry were done in! O' course! . . . Here's a letter with a Rutland address on it, ain't it?—one can't make it out very well, it's fadin' so—yes, "*Rutland*," and oh Lord, look at all the crosses for kisses at the bottom. . . . Ah well. . . .

There it goes in the wind, blowin' a long way from the lad that dropped it.

A power o' Turks buried here too. Seems the Rutlands put up a bit of a fight before they went under. But I say! It does one good, don't it, to think that our fellers came up and put it across the old Turk, jest where they cut up the Rutlands? This is an old Turk's letter, and I expect it's full o' kisses and slop too. . . . Funny! Seems a bit of a shyme in

a way—don't it. . . . Oh I dunno ! Sometimes I wonder what's the perishin' sense of it all

By every account the Victory of Romani was a famous victory. A Special Order of the Day announced that the Commander-in-Chief had received telegrams of congratulation from the King, the Sultan, the High Commissioner, the Sirdar, and the Minister of Public Works. Colonel Tappiter, now that the old Brigadier had returned, came back to his battalion, and paraded them, and shouted over their ranks the words of the telegrams. And those few of them, added the C.O., who had not come within firing distance of the enemy, had played their part in the victory, none the less, by their share of the heavy marching and the other hardships. Battles were won, said he, not by rifle-fire but by the movements of troops, and the winning factor was the obedience and the endurance of the men.

"Bah ! Back-scratching," grumbled Fred Roberts, whose attitude now was that he had spoiled for the scrap and been denied it. "Soft soap. . . ."

"Aye, and there goes me D.C.M.," said Corporal Stott, who had enjoyed a firm conviction that he was destined to win that distinction in the Battle of Romani.

"It looks as though you'll get your bones back to Blighty," said C Company's mess to Childe Harold, who had been vouchsafed a remarkable presentiment, and had published it for the interest of all students of psychic phenomena, that he would leave his bones to bleach in the desert.

They were right who held that the old moon of Ramadan would die before the armies clashed. Its successor had watched the fight, and now looked down upon the finish of it all. A night of mid-August, and Tony stood at his tent door, waiting to enjoy the fine sight of that moon, nowadays at the full, rising above the skyline. He had watched it, some evenings before, when, in the presence of the daylight, it had come up huge in circle, but shy and pale as a white cloud. To-night, with no daylight to blanch it, it would play a different game. From the camp at Pelusium the desert stretched away to the east till it rose in the ridge that had been the western limit of the battle. Suddenly over that ridge, with no

premonitory lighting of the world, peeped a red-gold rim of surprising width. It was the forehead of the moon. As it grew into a semicircle it burned a luminous orange, but kept all its light to itself, leaving the sky a night-blue expanse and the desert a dark featureless waste.

"'Tain't a moon at all," said Joe to the men, who were emerging in crowds from their tents to see the moon up. "It's a bloody Dutch cheese."

It soared up, changing its orange to a lighter yellow, and finding a power to flood with its own hue the neighbouring sky. And the smaller it became the more it lit welkin and wilderness, till at last its white rays came searching all things, and the sky was the colour of a slate behind an incandescent light, and the desert was the colour of cream. Its brilliance turned the stars to tinsel, and over the desert dropped an inky shadow at every rib and ripple and foot-print, so that the sands stretched away from Pelusium all speckled and straked like the back of an animal.

It looked down upon the desert it had lit, and saw what? It saw on the wide battle-ground the corpse of many a poor Turk who had died in some corner unreached by the burial parties; and behind, along the tracks of the Turkish advance, the carcasses of horses and oxen—and the bare-necked vultures flying towards them. More eastward still, in a desert growing brushwood like tufts of hirsute, it saw the Anzac Light Horse moving among the groves and wells of Bir-el-Abd; and far behind all these things the Turks themselves, wearily retreating upon their base at El Arish, seven thousand fewer than when they came marching westward.

CHAPTER VI

THE DESERT COLUMN

SO went Johnny Turk. Men told of Johnny that he had said but yesterday, with one eye on the narrow channel of the Dardanelles and the other on the curve of the river at Kut, that while he was ready to conclude peace with Russia, he saw no reason for doing so with England, whom he had so often beaten. Follow him home then. He had crossed the desert and threatened Egypt; now let *us* essay a crossing and threaten the Holy Land. He had failed, probably because his means of transport over a hundred miles of heavy sand were as primitive as the Syrian's before him; we would do better—we would take a railroad behind us. On our transport lines there should be not only horses and camels and mules, but steam. At present the railroad stopped at Romani, which was some ninety miles from the borders of the Holy Land; we would drive it forward through the sand dunes and over the sand valleys, at the rate of an English mile a day. Three months, and we would answer his "Check!" to Kantara with a "Check!" to El Arish. And by the side of the railway would go a pipe-line with pumping stations at every few miles, sucking up the water from the Sweet Water Canal, which is the water of the Nile. In front of the advancing railway the vanguard of the troops would spread out in the desert, with a screen of cavalry between them and the scouting enemy; and the remainder of the troops would lie at intervals along the line guarding its flanks. Such would be the Desert Column, now to be organized, and so to be called. It would take Railhead like a monarch over the desert, with more than a Sovereign's escort in front and an army of guards behind.

This, then, was to be the way that the British crossed the Wilderness of Sinai into Canaan, three thousand years after

Israel : locomotives bringing them, besides the ammunition for their battles, good bacon and marmalade for their breakfasts, and fags—Player's, Gold Flake and Woodbines—for the hours between meals. An unhurrying way, and somewhat stolid, if you like ; but wise. They fight better on these things. There will be hardships enough before El Arish is theirs : so give them their beef and their bacon.

So in the quiet of the sands after the battle of Romani the railway forged ahead—one mile a day. Enormous gangs of Gypsy labourers altered the contour of a strip of desert near the Mediterranean seaboard, working under the tutelage of the Royal Engineers—who, by the way, spoke Arabic now, though not as Cairo spoke it, but after the school of Stratford-atte-Bow. The first and largest gang made cuttings through the lofty dunes or raised viaducts across the deep hollows, their methods the simplest : they just shovelled the sand into baskets and carried it on their backs out of the cutting or on to the rising viaduct ; it was the method, ten times magnified, of the children wielding bucket and spade on an English shore. Next went a gang laying the sleepers on the new-made track, and laying them very close together, for the sands were a treacherous base. And lastly went a gang clamping down the rails. The wild imagery of the Hebrew prophet had become a fact : a highway was made straight in the desert, and every valley exalted, and every mountain and hill brought low.

The thousands of tourists and tradesmen who to-day are rumbled and bumped over that stretch of railway from Kantara to El Arish (it is a little bumpy, because a mile a day was hasty going), what think they of the thousands of Londoners, Lancastrians, Scots, and Anzacs who guarded it yard by yard in a year that is dead, the sun burning and blinding them, the enemy bombing them, the *khamsin* and the sand storms maddening them ; of whose bodies not a few lie under the sand in a parallel line with the railway and the water-pipe, their work enduring while they themselves are laid away ? The travellers reckon little of these men ; they sleep, carried along at many miles an hour, not at a mile a day ; and the desert palls. Gilban . . . Pelusium . . . fancy calling these "stations" when they're nothing but wastes of scrub ! . . . Romani . . . Bir-el-Abd. Dear heart, it's a dull journey.

And if they think little of an army that was once here and has now been gone these many years, what know they of this or

that individual man, and his petty emotions ? No ; of no moment at all that at Pelusium one evening in 1916 Lieut. O'Grogan approached a bell-tent which was the home shared by Aylwin and Harold Wimborne, and heard the voice of Lieut. Moulden and his own name ; and that, since the voice of Moulden could drive all nobility from his mind and hand it over to its fermenting obsession, he stayed where he was, with strained ears, eavesdropping.

"You know what's said about O'Grogan," mumbled the voice of Moulden. "I'm never quite sure that it's fair myself, but that's neither here nor there—really : the point is, whether or not the Colonel thought it of him."

"Do *you* think it of him ?" This was the voice of Childe Harold ; and one heard in it the deep interest of a boy in a puff of scandal.

"Well . . . I dunno ; but I mean to say : even if it was true of him at one time, he's been a damn good officer ever since he came back. Of course he's not been up against anything to test him. . . . So perhaps the Colonel was taking no risks."

"One would have thought"—these were the sententious accents of Aylwin—"that old Tappiter would have left out D Company rather than C. One imagines the Colonels get properly flustered when sudden orders come through for only three companies to go into battle, and that their minds register nothing but the order of the alphabet, and so they invariably send A, B and C into battle and tell D to stop where they are : isn't that so ?"

"That's right," said Moulden. "And that's my point—really. I mean to say, I can't help thinking that there was something very pointed about the Colonel's choosing A, B and D and leaving out C Company. I put it this way, that the C.O. had his doubts about Scrase and O'Grogan. Scrase was alright until after that stunt on December the 19th, when something seemed to go wrong with him ; he doesn't show it outwardly, of course, but, I mean, the old man's observant. And if you add to that, young O'Grogan's unfortunate reputation and the comparative newness of you two fellows and the fact that he's always detested me—well, you get an idea why C Company stayed at Gilban."

"Have another little spot ?"

"No, thanks. I'm feeling a little fuzzy already and I must

be going. I don't know why it is : I can take my whisky with the best at home, but in this confounded heat . . . Well, cheerio ! ”

“ No, don't go yet, Moulden,” begged Childe Harold. “ What *did* happen to Scrase on December the 19th ? ”

“ Ask me another. He fought magnificently, but he's never been quite the same since. You can see he's driving himself all the time. I mean, the night Colonel Tappiter came in and told us we were going straight into the fighting, I looked at Scrase and he turned as white as death.”

“ And how did Bungay take the news ? ”

“ He said, ‘ Oh glory ! ’ and looked as pleased as if he had been left a fortune. But I dunno : you can never tell how far he's acting a part. He's got so dreadfully sensitive about the hard things that have been said of him that he thinks he must always be playing the fire-eater——”

“ *You bloody liar !* ”

Tony, his face burning, his fists trembling and his voice breaking, was standing in the tent and staring at Moulden. Moulden was seated on a ration-box beside the camp table, and he paled. Aylwin and Harold were also seated on boxes ; they gaped. A silence surrounded Tony's entry. He addressed his words to Moulden, and there was menace in his tone.

“ I was passing and I heard what you said. And look here ! you can just——”

Moulden recovered quickly from his horrid moment of overthrow.

“ I was only taking your part——” he began.

“ Which is another bloody lie ! You know perfectly well that there's absolutely no justification for that story about me, and you hinted that there might once have been something in it. I heard you. You do all that you can—always—to keep it alive.”

“ Have a spot of drink, O'Grogan ? ” Harold invited cheerfully : he could think of no other way to meet the situation.

“ Not I ! ” answered Tony. “ It was a damned judgment on him that I should be passing at that minute. He knows perfectly well that I was ordered off the Peninsula, and that I didn't go of my own choice.”

“ But I've always said so,” protested Moulden.

“ No, you haven't . . . at least you have . . . Oh, you know well enough what you've done, and how you've done it. I've

called you a cad before, and you took it lying down. I repeat it now. Are you going to lie down under it again?"

"Oh, shut up, O'Grogan!" said Aylwin, never afraid to lecture his seniors. "You can't rush into our tent and start fighting."

"Well, let him come outside then."

"Rot. Moulden didn't say anything much against you. He was rather standing up for you, I thought."

"Yes, yes, of course he was," encouraged Harold. "Have a spot of whisky,"

"Oh, you don't understand. . . . He . . . he . . ."

"Oh, dry up, O'Grogan." Aylwin repeated his order. "We're just as much to blame as he is. We all talk scandal in this blasted desert. There's nothing else to do."

"No, no, you don't understand. He's just using you as his tools. He's just making you his messengers to spread a libellous little hint, and, by God! you can spread along with it that I knocked him silly for his pains——"

Before they could cope with him, Tony had struck out a Moulden, his fist missing the eye at which it was aimed and scraping in an ugly tangent past the left temple; Moulden had closed with Tony; and both had fallen against the canvas wall of the tent, whose centre-pole creaked under the strain. The table overturned, and the bottle of whisky began to empty its wealth into the sand.

"Here, stop that," shouted Aylwin, while Harold rushed to the whisky bottle. "The damned tent'll be down. Get out, O'Grogan. Don't come in here and make a beast of yourself."

Harold, having rescued as much as possible of the whisky, was at liberty to rescue as much as possible of the less important Moulden, and he helped Aylwin to pull the wrestlers apart; who then stood opposite each other, white-hot temper blazing in their eyes and vibrating in their limbs.

"O'Grogan, I think you'd better go," suggested Aylwin—he being an authority on deportment as on everything else. "Moulden, after all, is our guest in this tent: you're not, just now."

Tony did not move.

"I say, Good-bye, old thing," Harold hinted, not unkindly.

Tony turned.

"I suppose you're right. . . . And I'm sorry if I've been a

pig, but you don't understand. You . . . he . . . Oh well, I'm going. Good-bye."

"Have a spot of whisky before you go?"

"No, thanks."

"Well, so long, Bungay."

Tony was out in the fallen dusk, walking away at an abnormal speed, the passion within him an engine to drive him on. What good had he done? None at all; only harm. In a day or two it would be told all over the brigade how O'Grogan had fought Moulden, and what about—Harold, that child with the body of a blacksmith and the head of a jay, would be much too delighted with the yarn not to chatter about it everywhere.

The misery of it, the frustration, and the bewilderment! The ropes that bound him—constricting and inflaming—were woven of nothing—or of little more than nothing: of careless talk, and one man's airy half-lie, and other men's unimaginative but unmalicious chatter; they were gossamer, but, they had him tight, and he couldn't break away. And the irony of it. English virtues and English disabilities had blent to make these bonds; in their substance was England's sportsmanship, her love of the sticker, her shy hiding patriotism and her easy good nature, together with England's dullness and obstinacy and flight from thought. The thing that he loved, and wanted to fight for, had chosen him for a victim! Did he hate it, then? No, he didn't. It had captured his imagination, and he loved it; even in his anger he could see that its achievements were more than its failures; he could say that his faith was unshaken; but oh! to be able to break from its toils, and to fight in happiness again at its side.

Next morning Scrase and Tony rode northward from Pelusium Camp towards the Mediterranean shore. Their horses climbed the last hill, and when their eyes came above the skyline they saw a waste of sand level as an inland lake and stretching to the mirage that veiled the Great Sea. One long mound trembled in the mirage; otherwise the plain was unbroken, and its crystallized salt sparkled in the sun like mica or diamonds. That mound was their goal: wise men had told them that it was as interesting a spot as any in Northern Sinai.

As their horses' hoofs broke the crisp but brittle plain, or,

sinking into it, stumbled a little, Tony, very thoughtful, was closing a protracted inner debate: he was resolving that he would tell Kit of all that Moulden had said about both of them. Should honour and kindness keep his lips shut? Hang it, he didn't know. Why should he keep silence: one could argue that the captain of C Company must be informed when it was being traduced. Specious? Well, p'raps so, but he didn't care. Somehow Moulden's touch upon him was always leprous, slaying the health and waking the evil. Perhaps his motives were really selfish: a desire to injure his punisher and a longing for a companion in the unjust punishment. But what of it? He spoke; and Scrase rode grimly beside him, hearing the full story.

"Oh, he says that of me, does he?" Scrase commented, after a silence.

"Yes. I thought you'd better know, old man."

Silence again.

"Have *you* noticed anything wrong in me?" Scrase demanded at last.

"I thought you looked a bit groggy when you came off the Peninsula, that's all."

"Well, the trouble is that Friend Moulden's probably right. I think it's quite likely that old Tappiter left C Company behind for my sake—even though he knows C Company to be the best in the battalion, after Hughes Anson's."

When Kit had said this, his jaw went sideways, as a man's will who has determined to face an ordeal. Tony could answer nothing; and for a while there was only the sound of the crusted plain cracking under the hoofs.

"I wonder if I can make you understand what happened on December the 19th," Scrase went on. "Up till then I had believed that, though I hated the war, I could go through with it. But in that attack—oh, Bungay, it was—it was—but you'll see. I arrived first in the Turks' trench—only because I was desperately driving myself on, as some people do who doubt themselves—and I shot a wretched Turk who made a half-hearted attempt to bayonet me; and the rest of the Turks—there were about five in the bay—just stood there like frightened cows, staring at me. I don't know what kind of Turks they were—some poor half-starved Anatolian peasants I suppose. I hesitated a second, not liking to shoot them down in cold blood, and then one of them seemed to wake up

and come at me, and I shot him through the eye, and then suddenly I began to distrust my own hesitation, so I immediately emptied the other chambers of my revolver into the faces of the rest—one after another, and only to justify myself—and, Tono, they were simply cowed—our bombardment seemed to have stunned them—and one of them couldn't have been more than sixteen—and when my bullet smashed his face, I turned violently sick for a moment; I thought I was going to faint—have you ever nearly fainted? It's a ghastly sensation—but I pulled myself together, and in a kind of mad despair of everything, I began to fight and kill, with something of the joy of a homicidal maniac. I kind of felt, 'Oh to hell with everything and everybody in the world. If they want us to kill, let's do it! Let's kill the bloody world!' I tell you, I could have shot children at that moment. And the reaction the next day, it was like nothing I have experienced before. But from first to last, that attack and the reaction after it were such a sick and awful business that I began to dread the next time. . . . And that got mixed up with a dread lest I should fail; and these two dreads became a morbid obsession, a nightmare which haunts me when I'm awake as well as when I'm asleep, and even when I can't quite remember what the original fear was. . . . Do you know, Tono, I'm nearly sick every time I have to teach the men their bayonet practice, or when, on a rifle inspection, I look down the barrels of their rifles. . . . What'll happen when we really have to attack again, I don't know."

What could Tony say to all this? His words were poor enough.

"Couldn't you get sent home?" he asked.

"I don't see that I can. That would only be to run from a mental fear as others run from a physical fear. . . . No, one must stick it out. . . . And, Bungay, not the least horrid part of my present condition is the bewilderment. I seem to have lost faith in everything—can you understand? I doubt love and morality and beauty and truth and all of 'em. . . . I can see nothing standing upright anywhere."

There was a quickness in Tony's mind which enabled him to answer at once: "Well, you've just given the lie to that, old man. When you said that one must stick it out, you showed that you still believed in fidelity, at any rate."

Scrase seemed to meditate long; then he said:

"Yes, you've hit it. I still believe that men must stand by

one another, even if the universe is nothing but a mixture of savagery and illusion. I suppose that's why I'm still here. I suppose that's why I haven't shot myself long ago."

"Oh, shut up, Kit!" Tony protested.

"Sometimes I try to cling to old Tappiter's idea—that directly one's become a soldier, one's guaranteed to sacrifice all thoughts of one's own and to become a machine for doing the set job as efficiently as possible. . . . He's rather a simple old thing, no doubt; but simplicity is wisdom sometimes. . . . However, I mustn't worry you with my troubles."

And those words rebuked Tony.

They were now nearing the mound, and they observed that the face of the waste was peppered with red brick-chips and powdered with red brick-dust. What was this man-made substance doing here, broken into its myriad fragments and broadcast over the plain? And here they were passing a well, walled round with bricks which were surely Roman. The closer they came to the mound the thicker lay the brick chips; was the mound their source? Yes, the long, low, oval hill was red with them, the chips covering it like a brash. Riding round the hill, they found on its northern side a width of wall yet standing, whose bricks were like those seen in Chichester or St. Albans. They put their horses to the gentle slope and found here and there a recumbent pillar broken where it fell. At one place many massive columns lay parallel, the tops of their bases still showing at their feet, and the ponderous pediment which they once supported lying half-buried along their heads. The wreck of a temple entrance it seemed. Such tumbled majesty to find in the midst of a desert.

It was all that was left of the ancient imperial city of Pelusium, once the eastern key of Egypt. Here a Pharaoh Psammetichus met the Persians under Cambyses and was defeated. Here the armies of another king of Egypt faced those of his sister Cleopatra, while Pompey the fugitive was seeking to land here from the sea. In those days an arm of the Nile flowed this way and watered a flourishing town; but desiccation had won; and in the fullness of time the desert devoured Pelusium. And to-day as Scrase and Tony rode about the mound which was Pelusium's grave, with the desert stretching all round them, they came suddenly upon the bivouac of a Bedouin. It was made of desert rushes, and not six feet long nor five feet high. A pleasant sight, but why? Why pleasant to see the proud

erections of the brick-builders and the masons overthrown, and the simplest dwelling which the hand of man could fashion pitched among their ruins in unoffending triumph? Perhaps because the inner heart of man rejoices in every testimony that pomps shall wither but simplicity endure.

The poet in Tony could not but see in the prospect around him a picture of the transience and futility of all things. And Kit had seen it too.

"Well . . . why worry?" was his comment.

"Yes, why?" laughed Tony.

And they turned their horses for home, each riding in his own silence. Transience! Of what import now were the thoughts and fears of the soldiers of Psammetichus?

And yet Tony's thoughts went worrying on; he thought how he had not yet been compelled to kill men at close quarters like Scrase; but if he was to do the heroic deed that would re-establish his name, it would have to be in just such a murderous way. Was he as anxious to do it after hearing Scrase's story, which he could perfectly understand—yes, *perfectly*? Honestly, was he? *Yes*. He *must* do it; he simply *must*. Ha, it was plain enough that pity could not hold him back when love of his own good name drove him on. Where was he getting to, that he should count the lives of Turks or Germans as less important than the thoughts which a few simple-minded men might hold about his pluck? . . . But it was the truth; he saw it; and he had no strength to change it. He had only to think of Moulden talking to Aylwin and Wimborne, and hell! yes, he must go on. Funny! And this from one who had believed that he could love the whole world. But there was the fact, not to be denied. Rather did his teeth set in a resolution to slay the lie, no matter how many widows and children might weep in Stamboul or Berlin.

They arrived home to learn that the battalion would move forward to-morrow with the advancing railway; they would pass the outposts of the 52nd Division now guarding Rail-head, and themselves take over the desert watch, while Rail-head came up behind them.

At dawn a train rolled in to carry them as far as the track would allow. Its engine snorted into the "station," and all

cheered when they saw that it had been shipped from England and bore on its side the letters, L.S.W.R. The London and South Western Railway in the Wilderness of the Chosen People!

"Come along! 'Oos fer Portsmouth, boys?" shouted Art Webster. "Cheap excursion to Portsmouth! Got yer return ticket?"

"Nah! won't want return tickets," Joe Wylie answered. "They're burying us at Bir-el-Abd. Pop in."

The train stopped where the good rails stopped, and the men fell in for a long march through the sand. They passed the Gypsies clamping down the rails; they passed the gangs manhandling the sleepers and tossing them down on the newly-levelled way; they passed the vast multitude shovelling the sand out of a cutting and carrying it in baskets up the embankment, to the tune of, "Aye-yah-la! Aye-yah-la! Aye-yah-la!" Hundreds of marching tommies mimicked them: "Aye-yah-la! Aye-yah-la! Aye-yah-la!" Then an hour's plodding, and they passed the 32nd outpost, and knew that they were in the open desert, with nothing but the cavalry screen between them and the enemy.

Five thousand feet above them, to their great comfort, an aeroplane wheeled and banked and roared away into the menacing distances ahead, and roared back to them, and banked and wheeled again—God bless him! He was ready to fight old Fritz, the dare-devil Austrian, who made a hobby of coming out at a height of twelve thousand feet, and a speed of apparently twelve thousand miles an hour, and bombing the serpent of men which he could see crawling in front of the crawling railway.

Tony was wishing that he would come. It seemed a terrible thing to wish, but he couldn't deny the truth of his thought. He wanted the thrill, the excitement; and his eyes pierced the gloom ahead for the tiny speck, and his ears strained for the murmur of Fritz.

Fritz came. There was the unmistakable throb of an engine flying much higher than their escort; it grew louder, though never very loud; it sounded directly overhead; and a thousand up-turning faces—up-turning against a shouted order—saw him there, recognizing at once his wide wings and his fish tail. The British aeroplane was spiralling up to meet him—"That's the spirit!"—more British aeroplanes were roaring

up from behind, with their line of flight tilted towards the Austrian—"That's the stuff to give him!"—the anti-aircraft guns had opened, and white puffs of shrapnel hung themselves under his fuselage (but far too low) and in partnerships of two danced a pavane in the wind; the machine-guns chattered up there; and here came old "Also Ran," a very slow and immensely popular British machine which could never keep pace with its younger and faster sisters, but always chunked along, none the less, and turned about and went home again when it found that it was too late for the fight.

The Colonel shouted to the battalion to break its column; its units dispersed over the sands and lay on their bellies.

"You get the idea, don't you, chum," explained Fred Roberts. "It's 'eavy odds agin old Fritz 'ittin' us if we're in a narrer column, so we spreads out and gives him a reasonable targit. It's only sportin'."

There was an abrupt silence, a fearful quiet, for through the air whined that breath-arresting sound which in the same second was sigh, moan and roar; and the bomb exploded on a dune, hurling up sand and smoke.

"What a rotten shot! What a rotten shot! What a rotten shooter too!" sings Art Webster.

Three more bombs; and then Fritz swung round and raced for home, and the British machines, still striving to get to his level, spat bullets at his tail.

"Gah! they'll never catch 'im!" grumbled Fred Roberts. "That's the worst of them cheap machines. Why the devil can't we buy a decent one? 'Britannia rules the air.' Does she? Thump! . . . There goes old Also Ran. 'E's given up. 'E's for 'ome. Good-bye. . . . Good-bye-ee."

The R.W.E.s were now in full column-of-route again, and ploughing forward while they cast up their eyes to watch the British machines returning to their base.

"See the cars comin' 'ome from the Durby?" cried Joe Wylie. "It's all over bar shoutin'. Yeh, and I put me tanner on Fritz any day, I would."

Then nothing but the *chuff—chuff—chuff—chuff* of marching feet.

Bir-el-Abd. When Tony next wrote to Honor, he made

mention of one comfort which accrued to desert fighting : that as you moved from place to place you were not inspired to write home your descriptions of the changing landscape ; because it never changed ; it was always the same, whatever your movements ; and your first pen-picture would do duty for all. Bir-el-Abd was what ? Sand and scrub, and round it all the rim of a cloudless Egyptian sky.

Their first night at Bir-el-Abd was a jumpy night. Van-guards are always uneasy. It was lonely squatting here so far in front of the reserves, with the enemy well advised of their position and conspiring in Lord knew what stratagems. There were Bedouins in the darkness too—a poor grade of Bedouins, from all they had seen of them, but stealthy creatures and mischievous.

Tush, tush : one had to get used to this feeling of loneliness. Colonel Tappiter sent them to their posts with a dark jest : “ Stand to, and if the Turks come, God help you.” They went ; armed with flares to fire—white, should they sight the Turk ; red, did he attack. . . . Beneath the desert stars the darkness was diluted with light, and eerie ; and their eyes watered as they strained at the patches of scrub—for scrub could look so like to stalking men.

But this apprehensiveness was of the first night only. Two or three days of a Bir-el-Abd as quiet as Pelusium or Gilban, with the ration camels coming and going, and the mess stores dragging into camp on wooden sleighs, and a stray Anzac horseman wandering in from in front with the report of an empty desert—and all were easy again. They raised the football posts on a salted flat, and company played company when the sun had dropped ; and platoon played platoon. Once they rounded up a herd of Bedouins and imprisoned them in a barbed wire compound—why, they didn't know ; they had been ordered to do it. And then in shorts, shirts and helmets they stood around the barbed wire and gaped at their catch.

They were worth gaping at, these dirty old Abrahams and ragged old Sarahs, these pretty young Rachels (far less ragged) and that veiled old hag who was reputed to be a hundred and two—but all wise gapers stood to windward. Not even the lovely Rachels were best approached on their lee ; and if you added to the contribution of the humans the aggregate smell of their mange-ridden camels, their ponies, goats and poultry

—my fathers ! were the companies of the patriarchs as strong as this when they came with their thousands of asses and camels, and men-servants and maid-servants ? That Old Moore there, he was said to be especially strong. Captain Hughes Anson even reported his strength to Colonel Tappiter, who stood by and put up a pair of spectacles and demanded, “ Which ? ” for he was anxious to see this record-holding old gentleman. And when he saw him, a skinny old carcass hung with multi-coloured rags and matted hair, he removed his spectacles and said only, “ Not a very dressy fellow, what ? ” and walked away. Meanwhile the tommies were looking at the brown and bright-eyed maidens, and declaring, “ She gave me the glad eye, she did—the saucy bint.” And now that the Colonel was gone they pointed out to one another the Colonel’s girl. This was a girl who had wept so bitterly when she was rounded up with her family that Colonel Tappiter, in kindly mood, and forgetful of her ignorance of English, had stroked her gently on the shoulders and soothed her, saying, “ Never mind, my dear, don’t cry—don’t cry ; everything will be all right.” But she was weeping still.

Presently there was a broil. Fred Roberts was in altercation with an ancient Bedouin. The ancient Bedouin, in driving a baby camel to its corner, had prodded its rump with a piece of wood sharply spiked with a nail ; and Fred Roberts wasn’t falling for cruelty like that. “ ’Ere ! Stop that ! ” he shouted. “ Stop that, I tell yer ! Crool old b—— ! Look at ’im : he’s shovin’ a nyle into that there camel’s arse.” A chorus of execration supported him, so he continued : “ ’Ere stop it ! Leave ’im be ! You do that again and you’ll ’ave the point of my bayonet in your own backside for a change. Yuss ! See how you like that. . . . Dirty old excrement ! ” The Bedouin, perceiving at last that he was doing something that was unpopular with the audience, stood and stared at them ; and the English soldiers, with anger flooding their cheeks, stared back and shouted their abuse. Fred Roberts made as if he would scale the barbed wire and knock the old gentleman down. And so in a profound misunderstanding they faced each other : the old brown man of the East, and a railwayman from Southend, each obtusely unaware that his own attitude to the lower animals was not valid the whole world over.

At Bir-el-Abd they had no tents, except the Colonel’s

forty-pounder. With palm sticks and blankets the men made bivouacs for shelter from the blazing sun by day; and at night took down the blanket walls, and, wrapping themselves up in them, slept beneath the open sky. Or the lucky ones, who were near an oasis, built their "bivvies" out of interlaced palm branches; and the sunlight, piercing through, dappled their sleeping blankets with gold; the moonlight dappled them with silver. Had you slept near Weymann's Dump, you awoke to the jingling of bells, the crying of Arab voices, and the grunting of the camels whose bells they were: it was the water coming up; for Railhead was still some distance behind Bir-el-Abd and the pipe-line much farther yet. Long strings of camels, with a white-gowned Gypsy to lead each three, were approaching Weymann's Dump, and the twelve-and-a-half-gallon tanks swung on their sides.

From breakfast at ten o'clock was an anxious time: it was Fritz's visiting hour. Thrice a week, or more frequently, his palpitating drone troubled the eastern sky—how well they learned to distinguish his peculiar cyphering note!—and he hovered overhead in the early blue, and dropped a dozen of his visiting cards, and sped away as if his heart were in his mouth, evanescing in the bright, white eastern haze.

For all to lie on their faces and await the issue of the bombs was held to be precaution enough in the first days; till the morning when a bomb found the heart of C Company's bivouacs, and five lads did not rise to their feet, as the others did, when the danger was gone by. All ran towards them and saw the sand crimsoned at their side and the brains of one lying in a pulp against his hair. None of them responded to touch or voice: the five were dead. And Tony was appalled with himself; for, if he were to be honest, he must admit that he had not been without his thrill at the sight of that sudden death. They carried the dead out of the camp, and at sundown buried them. And in Battalion Orders that night, it was written that funk-holes must be dug beside every bivouac; to each man his own hole. The men declared that they were longing for Fritz to come again that they might jump into these six-foot graves.

Two mornings later he came: the familiar throb trembled again in the upper skies, and a thousand hearts had scarcely begun their own answering throb, when a bomb detonated less than five hundred yards away, and another was whining

down. . . Two hundred yards. . . In the next few seconds Tony, crouching in his grave—though never so palpitant with life—peeped over its rim and saw Colonel Tappiter standing before his tent and shouting at the men, “Get into your holes—be damned to you! Get into your holes—be damned to you!” and making no attempt to step into his own; he saw the men disappear into the ground like a field of scuttling rabbits; he saw the Gypsies who had been holding the camels by Weymann’s Dump abandon their ropes and rush wildly about—some into the desert, some under the bellies of their animals—while they shrilled out, as if the bomber could hear them, “Me no Engleesh! Me no Engleesh! May their religion perish!” he heard the whine and roar of the third bomb and—after a breathless duck—saw a black and yellow cloud smoking up from the sand near the straying camels; he saw one camel turn its slow, stupid head towards its flank, as if to learn what had struck it there, and then collapse on to its knees and on to its belly and turn its slow, patient head towards its tail, to die; he saw the next camel leap to escape, but, finding itself moored to its fallen companion, turn its slow, philosophical head as if in survey of the situation and then remain patiently standing where it was; and lastly he saw Colonel Tappiter doubling into his own hole, many seconds too late.

The raid was over, and none but the poor camel had died: hundreds of men lifted a grin above their graves, and themselves after the grin. It was now that Tony recalled having seen Scrase acting after the pattern of the Colonel and neglecting to visit his own hole till he had shouted his men into theirs. And it had been an easy, and not a forced, action. It was not physical danger of which Kit was afraid.

Bir-el-Abd. Those liquid syllables were to fill for ever with remembered pain. The 15th had lingered many weeks at Bir-el-Abd; Railhead had overtaken them and was pushing on through the desert many miles in front; one battalion of the 52nd (Lowland) Division, and another and another, had long ago marched past their camps of bivouacs and gone ahead to become the vanguard; November had broken. And one afternoon the rumour ran among the bivvies that the mail was in; and immediately Tony became one of the many officers and “Other Ranks” converging at a run upon the Post Corporal’s tent.

"Lieutenant O'Grogan? Yes, sir. Some for you. Quite a lot, I fancy."

"Oh, good!"

Never had such a sheaf of letters been put into his hand. Walking back to his bivvy, determined not to read them till he should be within the privacy of his blanket walls, he allowed himself no more than a glance at the handwriting of each. One from Honor. One from Jill—bless her! One from "ma-in-law"—hallo! she didn't often write—bless her too! One from his mother—how shaky her hand was getting. One of course from the devoted Peggy, for Peggy never failed to write; he had known Honor fail one week, and hadn't she heard about it!—Gosh! what a strafing he had sent!—but not once throughout two years had this best-loved sister neglected on her Sunday night, after a day of spiritual gorging in church, to sit down and write to him one of those chatty confections that only she could mingle. The honest truth was that, as a letter-writer, Peggy outshone Honor by a few hundreds of candle-power. One from Joyce. Hallo, this one was from Father Michael surely! Yes! "On Active Service"—"Field Post Office"—and censored by himself: "M. Saffery, C.F."—for Michael Saffery had left the ranks some time ago and taken a chaplaincy. First time that Peggy's husband had written to him for years! Strange how they had always tacitly distrusted each other, he and Peggy's husband. One from—good lord! one with a French civilian post mark from the poor old father who had left them ten years before. How funny that all the letters should arrive together, as if it were his birthday or something. Almost everyone had written—except Keatings and Derek, who, like most brothers, never wrote at all—blast them!

But wait: why should Joyce's letter, Peggy's, and his mother's all be in separate envelopes? Were they not still living together in the Chiswick home? The postmark on all three was "Chiswick." H'm, funny! For a moment he had a wild fancy that the award of some medal to him, or a mention in dispatches, might have been published, and they were all writing to congratulate him.

He was now at the opening of his bivvy, and he dipped his head and flung himself on to his valise, and, resting on his right elbow, prepared to enjoy his magnificent mail. Put them in order—the least important first, the best for the end:

Father Michael's on top of the pile, and Peggy's last but one, and Honor's at the bottom. He broke Father Michael's envelope.

"My dear old boy . . ."

Quaint opening from a tacitly hostile brother-in-law, but then didn't Father Michael always show something of the professional unction of a High Church priest?

"I hasten to add my voice to all the others that must be offering you their deepest sympathy in this terrible hour——"

Hell! what was coming? What was he working up to, with his preacher's language?

"—even though I realize that my voice, brother-in-law though I am, is almost an outsider's at such a moment, and that, however stunned I myself may be, I have not the same right of grieving as my darling Peggy has, and Joyce and you, and your poor, poor mother. Keatings was a great fellow behind his mantle of cynical humour, and Derek, despite his undoubtedly less lovable nature, was a fellow of sterling worth——"

O God! . . . Keatings *was*! *Was*!

Derek *was*! . . .

Tony heard a suppressed moan in his bivouac: it was his own. He repeated it: it eased him. With his lips far parted, as of a man whose breath is shortened and disorderly, he read on hurriedly.

Keatings and Derek both killed in the last phases of the Somme battle. Keatings killed in an attack, while leading his company over the top; Derek, who had transferred to the Tanks, killed by a shell in his disabled tank which he had refused to desert.

Oh . . .

All the letters had the same motive. Numbly he read them. Honor's beginning, "Tony darling . . ." Jill's beginning, "Dearest, dearest Tony . . ." Peggy's ending, for her heart, as ever, had taken command and forced her to send, not the comfort she wished to send, but her own pain: "Oh Keatings, Keatings—Tony, what are we to do without him? And darling, darling old Derek . . ." His mother's fretful and wailing: "Can't you come home now? Two is enough for any family to give." And his father's perhaps the most pitiable of all: "Do you suppose my boys forgave me before they died? Write and tell me they did, Tony; and live

yourself, *live*, if you wouldn't break an old man's heart. . . ."

Keatings *was*.

The brutality of that word! It was merciless; it gave nothing. Keatings, funny old Keatings—he who, ever since their mother had bowed before the assault of life and abdicated, had been the anchor of the family, in his quiet, undistinguished way—Keatings is no more. And Derek, the family's mystery man—the family's joke—Derek, the secretive, the self-sufficient, the lonely—Derek is no more. He just *isn't*.

Tony gathered the letters together and walked out into the desert. There was a fullness in his throat and a welling in his eyes that must be carried away from the neighbourhood of men. He wandered a long way over the dips and rises of the desert, till he stood in a shallow depression, far from sight of the scattered bivouacs, far from the murmur of men; and the silence of the sands was all around him. Here he threw himself on one elbow and palmed up the sand and ran it through his fingers. Now that this fullness in the throat and welling in the eyes had come so far, let them break through. Let them break: one would be easier then. And one had only to think of Keatings as he had been. . . .

Oh, God. . . .

And Derek. Derek bragging, long years ago, that the future was with the motor engine, and with him! When he said those words, he hadn't foreseen the tank. . . . But it was like old Derek, with his heavy conscientiousness, to stay in his disabled tank and perish with it. . . . Derek, the lonely, in his tank. . . .

Tony shamelessly cried, putting his face on to his arm and burying his sobs in his elbow's crook.

Night was drawing over the desert; he must return. And, just as he was about to clamber to his feet, he was suddenly, horrified to discover in himself a little focus of pleasure—pleasure at the thought of the interesting figure he would now present to the battalion's officers and men, who had just heard in his mail that two brothers had been killed. Good heavens!—a shudder went through him—was it so that he could feel that? Oh no, no! And yet—Tony was always frank with himself—the temptation was undoubtedly there. Oh no. . . . Keatings . . . Derek . . . God! what was he thinking of? How quickly and how treacherously did the deathless egotism of a man shoot out its forked tongue and poison him! No,

no. . . . In his resolve not to give one inch of ground to this hateful temptation he pillowed his face in his elbow again and thought hard of his brothers, and of their long childhood together—picturing—picturing. . . .

Now he lifted his head. He would say nothing to anyone of what he had heard. Thus would he be sure that the poison had not worked in him. Yes, that was what he would do. For such a thought to have visited his mind at all was condemnation enough—a condemnation that shuddered through him.

Quieted by his resolve, he rose up and rambled back.

Recently C Company had procured a small square Indian tent for their mess, and into this Tony entered now. Dinner was soon on the little table, and during the meal he tried to play his customary part, though now and then he drew a chaff about his silences. After dinner they asked him to play bridge, but he declined, saying that he did not feel like it to-night. So Scrase and Moulden, Aylwin and Harold made up a four round the table, while Tony sat on a box smoking a pipe and pretending to read. And he passed through a strange experience. In the first minutes his consciousness apprehended the usual cries, "Two No Trumps"—"Three Spades"—"John, bring some more whisky"—"Four Diamonds"; and then all these voices died out and he was playing in the Children's Room of his Kensington home, or sitting through a Children's Service in his father's grey church while the afternoon dusk deepened in the aisles, and Mr. Flote lit the gas brackets one after another; or he was romping on the downs above Freshwater Bay with Peggy and Joyce and Keatings and Derek, and presently words were uttered, "Two Spades"—"Double Two Spades"—"Content," and his wits refused to come together and tell him if it was Joyce or Peggy or Derek who had called, "Two Spades"; he struggled to force them together, and sharply the synthesis fell into shape, and he knew that he was in a little two-pole tent in the Wilderness of Sinai, while Keatings and Derek were six feet under the earth of France.

"Your lead, Moulden. . . ."

CHAPTER VII

FOLLOW THE ENEMY HOME

HE was glad to leave Bir-el-Abd, when two days later the battalion received orders to march forward and take the van again. Once more the 15th were in column-of-route, their boots fumbling through the soft sand, their sweat falling like thunder-drops on their shorts and drying immediately in the sun, their faces towards Jerusalem. They plodded on, bowing their shoulders under their weighted packs like Bunyan's Pilgrim (though, to be sure, that godly man carried the burden of his own sins while these excellent Christians carried the sins of the nations). They plodded on; and not thirty minutes of the march had gone before the leading men turned on to the main track beside the railway and found their feet treading upon wire.

"Wire! Wire!" went the familiar warning from mouth to mouth down the column.

But it came with laughter; and the men behind were at a loss to understand why the cry of "Wire! Wire!" should seem so funny. Usually it meant nothing more than that the march was crossing some telephone wire which signallers had laid upon the ground, and that all men must lift their feet so as neither to trip nor break the cable. Evidently to-day it meant something different—something hilarious. And was it imagination to suppose that the pace of the column had quickened and that those in front who had yelled the word were marching briskly, cheerfully—even springily?

"Wire! Wire!"

The back of the column had the answer quickly: their boots stepped off the fatiguing sand and trod the Wire Road.

This was the first time the 15th had met the Wire Road, that simplest and most illustrious participant in the conquest of Sinai. Aye, there were three great partners in the conquest

of Sinai; and they traversed the desert side by side: the Railway, the Pipe-line, and the Wire Road, and the greatest of these was the Railway, and the slowest was the Pipe-line, and the cheapest was the Wire Road. It was simply four breadths of chicken-run wire-netting pegged down side by side. Such a road could be laid over the dunes, and away towards El Arish, just as fast as four men could unroll the rolls of netting, and four more could drive in long pegs with a mallet. It held up the feet of the marchers from sinking in the sand and probably increased the mobility of the army by fifty per cent.; and a surprise mobility was the master-key to the problem of outwitting the Turks in this wilderness of immobilizing sand. The Railway was no surprise, nor the Pipe-line; Fritz knew the last word about them; but from his great height he could hardly guess the Wire Road.

A new merriness swept down the column as it made its acquaintance with this most welcome relief. Here was opportunity for Joe Wylie. "Someone's a bloody genius," shouted a voice; but Joe called back, "Don't be too 'appy abaht it. They'll make us double on this, like as not. . . . Double, lads, double! Knees up nah! Bring them knees up. Lift 'em up!" This earned for him the usual laugh, so when he had ceased laughing himself, and withdrawn his hand from covering his bashful moustache, he strove to go one better. "Gaw! Can't keep this pace up. I feel like a bleedin' telephone message travellin' along the wire." To which a voice answered: "A damn rotten message for Johnny Turk." "Yuss, you're right there," admitted Joe. "They'll jest abaht crumple up when they know old Joe Wylie's comin'. Casey Jones"—he had blossomed into song:

"Casey Jones, mounted on his engine,
Casey Jones, his spanner in his hand,
Casey Jones, mounted on his engine,
Took his famous trip to the Promised Land.

"Casey said, If you want to flirt,
Never get a girl with a hobble skirt . . ."

But even the Wire Road could not make a seven-hour march over the soft, monotonous hills and under the broiling sun anything but a thew-aching, breath-beating exercise, and soon the laughter and singing were left abaht; and the men were tramping through the hours—tramping, tramping, tramping,

on the chicken-run wire, heads down, shoulders bowed and sweat falling. Past Railhead; past the Gypsy gangs who were raising up the viaducts or shovelling out the cuttings; past the 52nd outposts; and on through the loneliness of the unoccupied wastes ahead; on, with the officers' maps out, to track their way to a map-reference at Mazar. Now the Wire Road stopped, presumably because it could not advance into a yet unguarded country, and their feet sank and splashed again in the yielding sand. Some homing pigeons passed over their heads, flying towards the base, and Joe, gazing up at them with opened mouth, suggested: "'Ello! 'Ello! They're taking an S.O.S. back, they are. Guess that means the kevelry's bin all cut to pieces in front of us. We're *for* it, boys, if you arst me. . . . *Yurse*," he concluded with rich appreciation, "that means we're *for* it."

It was twilight when they halted at a desolation which the Colonel said was Mazar.

Once again their first few days in the new advanced position were jumpy days. A Special Order spoke of the proximity of the Turks, and forbade any lamps or candles in the bivouacs after 22.30, or any lighting of fires before the morning "Stand to" at 04.00. They must be on their guard, also, against the German and Austrian spies who might come as mounted officers, dressed in a British uniform and speaking a perfect English.

Brigade was so apprehensive of these subtle and crafty visitors that their promptness in action led to one of the most famous adventures of their very famous padre. One of these sinister apparitions was reported to be on his rounds, and an order was sent to every unit for his arrest at sight. Padre Quickshaw chanced to be dining with Colonel Tappiter in Battalion Headquarters when the order came. The Colonel and the Adjutant, the M.O. and the Q.M. were disputing as to whether it was possible, by talk sufficiently unchaste or by other means, to bring a blush to the cheek of their spiritual adviser. There was a wager formed on it. The Colonel held that it was possible—he was always romantic. The M.O. and the Adjutant were confident that it wasn't possible—they were realists both. The Q.M. was neutral. And now they were putting the matter to the test, for there were fifty piastres to be won. The Adjutant told a story, and Quickshaw only laughed, "Haw, haw!" The M.O. told a worse—a professional one; and the Colonel loudly claimed that there was

the faintest tincture on the priestly cheek, and that the piastres were his ; but the others, after the closest scrutiny, disallowed it. A dish of Maconochie stew was brought in and the Colonel asked Quickshaw, "Padre, do you know what a Maconochie is before it is tinned?"

"Lord, no," laughed Quickshaw. "Nobody does."

"Well, that's where you're wrong, padre. *I* do," said the Colonel. "I'll tell you. Once there was a very amorous old cockerel, a tough old bird, and he fell in love with a rabbit, and the rabbit granted him her favours, and the result of this—er—this——"

"*Crime passionnel*," supplied the M.O.

"Yes, whatever that means," said the C.O., "—the result of this union was an animal called the maconochie——"

All laughed and there was a further close examination of Quickshaw's cheek. The Colonel put up his spectacles for the scrutiny, and just as they were pronouncing the results negative, a runner from the Orderly Room entered with a telegram for the Adjutant. The telegram was from Brigade. It stated that during the day a man on a grey horse had been visiting scattered sections of the R.E.s and other divisional units, and making inquiries about the number of men at each post and the nature of their work ; it gave a full description of the man, "short, round-eyed, sparse-haired, rather untidy in appearance, wearing artillery boots, Army Ordnance riding breeches, and an Indian puggree tunic, but without any badges of rank ;" and it concluded by ordering his immediate arrest by any unit among whom he might appear.

The Adjutant, suspecting nothing, read out the telegram to the little company at dinner. It was Padre Quickshaw who startled them by saying, "Good God ! Joo think they mean *me* ?"

And beyond doubt he was blushing.

All besought his meaning.

A grin bent the corners of Quickshaw's mouth. "Well," he said, "it describes what I've been doing all day. When I got here I discovered that there were all sorts of small units who hadn't seen a padre for years, so I took a horse—that damned grey of Hartley's too—and rode out to find 'em. And yes, I remember asking more than one N.C.O. how many men he'd got, and when they were free, because I was thinking of giving them an evensong some time or another. Joo think it's *me* ?"

The disconcerted stare of Quickshaw's protruding eyes, and the deepening blush, evoked an uproar.

"Blazes! it's the padre," cried Colonel Tappiter. "But, padre, come, come: they wouldn't call you 'untidy.' . . . No it can't be you."

"Besides," said the Adjutant, "you must have told them who you were, didn't you?"

"I don't know," answered Quickshaw. "I thought I did, but perhaps I forgot to."

"Artillery boots." The Colonel's head came up from beneath the table where he had been scrutinizing the lower parts of Quickshaw. "Army Ordnance breeks—which, by the way, have probably never been paid for—padre, *do* say that you were wearing a puggree tunic this afternoon——"

"I was."

"Splendid! It *is* the padre. . . . Padre, I put you under instant arrest. Ring up Brigade, Eadie, and tell 'em we've got their man."

"Yes, sir," said the Adjutant, jumping up. "And should I arrange for a firing party in the morning to shoot him? We've plenty of men available with nothing much to do. They'd enjoy a little job like that."

"Better ask Brigade first," recommended the Colonel seriously.

"Idiots!" Quickshaw was always rather tongue-tied when under fire.

"Better ring up Brigade at once, Eadie," said the Colonel.

"Paw!" scoffed Quickshaw. "I should have thought a man of the Colonel's age would have had more sense. . . . Eadie, of course—he's still a child."

The Adjutant took no notice.

"Should I mention that he has been identified as the C. of E. chaplain, sir?" he asked of the Colonel.

"*H'm*. . . . Yes." Colonel Tappiter only gave this "yes" after much rumination. "Yes, tell 'em—only it'll cut 'em to the quick. . . . Cut 'em to the quick to think their padre's been selling his country. The Brigadier'll be heart-broken; he loved him—loved him like his own son. So did the Brigade Major."

"Idiots!" repeated Quickshaw.

"Right, sir," said the Adjutant, and ran out.

"Here!" Quickshaw called after him.

"No. No good, padre," the C.O. counselled. "Too late, too late. . . . Well, this is splendid! Damn! bring some more drink, Barnes. Padre and I are going to split a bottle of whisky over his untimely end. Yes, we must all drink with him before he dies."

The Adjutant returned.

"I've got him off, sir," he reported.

"Well, *there's* a friend for you, padre!" said the Colonel. "How did you manage it, Eadie?"

"I suggested that now we've got as near to El Arish as this, nothing could be more likely than that the padre would be out looking for the Promised Land."

"Infantile idiocy!" muttered Quickshaw.

"And the Brigadier suggested that it would be quite possible he was looking for the Lost Tribes——"

"Yes, yes," agreed the M.O. "Or Moses' grave. Moses was buried here somewhere, wasn't he?"

"Well, I've met some childish senses of humour in my life," began Quickshaw, "but——"

"Splendid!" cried Colonel Tappiter. "He's saved. The padre's saved to trouble us a little longer. Hell! we must have some more whisky on this. We must wet the padre's release. Honestly, I'm glad, padre, on the whole. We'll have a special *Te Deum* next Sunday at Church Parade—yes, make a note of that, Eadie."

"Right, sir."

That night Tony awoke in his bivouac with the sudden sense that there were footsteps without. Quietly, his heart fluttering, he rose on to his elbow and bent a straining ear towards the sound. They were the steps of one man only, and seemed to be walking away to the north. The memory of all the spy-talk rushed upon him, and, because his vitality at such an hour was at its lowest, he remained on his elbow, fixed by a fear which had enlarged beyond reason. He did not breathe. Only he turned his wrist soundlessly that he might see the face of his watch. It was eight minutes past three. He could not hear the steps now, and, as his heart steadied, he began to wonder why the voice of the guard had not sounded in the night with its challenge to a moving figure. His fear

was now swallowed up in an eagerness to win the honour of having captured single-handed a prowling spy while the camp slept. He scrambled out of his valise, crawled on his knees out of the low-pitched bivvy, and stood erect at its entrance, revolver in hand.

There was no one to be seen: to left of him the brown bivouacs of Scrase, Moulden, Aylwin and Wimborne stretched down a gentle slope, laying their shadows away from the moon; in front of him the brushwood dappled the desert to the furthest tilt of the sands.

Disappointment succeeded to eagerness; and he was wishing that that eerie sound of a movement through the loose sands might perplex his ears again—he had abandoned hope of it and was sinking into melancholy small-hour thoughts of Keatings and Derek—when, of a sudden, he saw a figure rise up from behind some scrub and walk towards the bivouacs. The figure appeared to be clad in loose-fitting trousers and jacket of a light colour: pink or cream. There was nothing furtive about it, but something sad: its head was bent towards the ground. As it came nearer Tony withdrew into shelter and dropped to a sitting position. The figure had not observed him, he was sure; but it was coming straight towards his bivouac, or towards Scrase's, ten paces away.

Soon he knew who it was: it was Kit himself, wandering about the desert in nothing but a pink silk sleeping suit. He slunk further under cover, not liking that Kit should be embarrassed by discovery; and he saw him arrive at the entrance of his own bivouac and stand there, as if repelled from entering it again. Now Kit was lighting himself a cigarette, and the hand which held the match was shaking. . . . And now—it was done before Tony could elude it—Kit had paced in front of him and seen him where he squatted.

"Allah destroy you!" cried Tony with a laugh, thinking it best to cover the incident with gaiety. "You frightened me out of my wits. I thought you were a spy."

"Hallo, Bungay!" Kit had reciprocated the laugh. "You rather frightened me too—suddenly materializing out of the ground like that!"

"What's the matter? Can't you sleep?"

"No; not too well. Thought I'd try a stroll."

"Yes, but it's so cold, old thing. Gosh, it's perishing!"

"Yes, I'd begun to notice that," laughed Kit.

Tony, looking up at him, saw that his whole body was shivering.

He saw another thing to-night : he noticed, as never before, the exceptional physical beauty of Scrase—the tall figure with its wide shoulders and shapely breast, the slim limbs, the round but noble young face where intellect and youth met in genial dispute ; the eyes, searching and sensitive, but lively too ; and, crowning all, those volutes of strong fair hair with which the gods so often crown a form that has delighted them.

"Confound it, old man ! You'll be chilled through," Tony rebuked him. "Get your British Warm if you want to drift about like this."

"Oh, but I'll be turning in again now. It helps you to sleep if you get really cold."

"It does. A little too much of it, and you sleep for ever. Which would be a pity, wouldn't it ?"

"Well . . . perhaps you're right. . . ." Scrase said it laughing ; and hesitated a little longer. "Well, good night."

"Good-night—or good-morning, rather."

Scrase had wandered back to his bivouac, and Tony could hear him enveloping himself in his sleeping valise.

Tony did not get into his own bed : thoughts were coursing too rapidly through his brain. He knew that Kit, had he possessed the slightest ability to speak of his own feelings, would have liked, in that moment of hesitation, to pour out some story to his friend, as he had done once before on the road to Pelusium ; but his nature had inhibited the utterance, and he had turned away to suffer alone. Ah, but why ? . . .

Probably not till this moment had Tony measured the depth of his affection for Kit ; it seemed to well up and rush forward to that bivouac beside him.

One thing he did not perceive, but it was true : the realization of Kit's physical beauty was playing no small part in heightening this affection. It had always been the same with Tony O'Grogan—ever since the cherubic face of little Wavers had troubled his early schooldays : the delight of the eye could carry him at a breath into an unreasoning love. And now, in the throbbing of this heightened affection, he leapt up, seized his British Warm, and, flinging it on, went across to Kit's bivouac.

"Asleep, old man ?" he asked, peering in.

"No."

"Well, may I come in and talk a bit?"

And before an answer could come, he was sitting at the foot of the valise.

"What's wrong, Kit?" he demanded. "I know you're worried. Do tell me."

"Oh, it's nothing."

"Yes, it is. . . . And I'm not going till you tell me, if I sit here all night. You took me into your confidence before."

Kit did not answer; and Tony encouraged him with a laughing, "Come on!"

"I had a perfectly putrid dream," Kit confessed, sounding the note of levity too. "I get it often now; and it always plays me up in this way. Sorry: it's damned silly, I know; but I can't help it."

"I don't suppose it's silly at all. What is the dream? It sounds interesting," Tony chaffed.

Scrase hesitated, and then said, "Did you know that we were going to attack the old Turk very soon?"

"I didn't."

"Well, we are. Any day now. I heard it yesterday; and I suppose that brought on the dream again. I—I always dream that I'm in some trenches on the Peninsula, waiting to take the company over in the first wave of an attack, and the moment comes, and I climb out, and my body, despite my will, is somehow or other going the wrong way; I try to force it round, but it goes on independently of me—and the men call to me to come on, but something prevents me turning round—I *can't*—and then I'm awake. It sounds nothing when told baldly like that, but it's hell to go through, Bungay—absolute hell. . . . Oh, but it's nothing. I don't want to worry you with it."

He said no more; and Tony spent a long minute preparing sentences of consolation or advice, but jettisoning them all. When he spoke, he hardly cared what he said: he had spoken only because the silence was becoming oppressive.

"Wouldn't it be better if you got a staff job, old man?"

"Tono, it's like this," said Scrase, after he had made up his mind to unload his full thoughts. "There's a kind of clash in me between two—I don't know what to call 'em—'loyalties,' if you like: there is a loyalty to my conviction—which may be wrong but is mercilessly clear to *me*—of the bestiality of all this slaughter; and there is a loyalty to the men—to the army—to the country, if you like, in this shocking

mess-up into which we've all got ourselves. Well now: to be loyal to the first and to cut and run from everything seems so much the easier solution that I feel pretty sure it's the wrong one. . . . You see, I feel that I ought to be prepared to suffer something along with the men, and if *my* little bit of suffering is mainly mental while theirs is physical, well, perhaps that's a fair arrangement! D'you know: all the mere physical discomfort and pain is nothing to me—I rather enjoy it, because it eases my mind! It's only the idea of attacking again which plays me up at times——”

“But in a staff job——” began Tony.

“Oh damn, no!” Scrase protested. “To take a staff job would be a mean denial of both loyalties: it would be to run from my little bit of discomfort, and at the same time to be doing all I could to prosecute the war. No, I'm not going to do that. . . . It's different for other men, I know,” added Kit, with his quick generosity, “but that's how it would work out for me. No, we've all got to stick out something; and I'll stick out my share. . . . And I don't feel that so far it's made me let the company down in any way——”

“You can be quite sure of that, old thing,” said Tony confidently. “Old Tap thinks a hell of a lot of C Company.”

“Well then, there we are!” laughed Scrase. “Let's get on with the war! I say, Tono: I should never have believed that I should tell all this to you. I don't know how you got it out of me. I haven't told it to another soul. Oh yes, I have, though: to one other.”

“Who was that?” asked Tony, surprised at his jealousy of this other one.

“Old Quickshaw,” answered Kit, grinning. “Yes, Quickshaw, of all people. He blew in one day and just ordered me to get off my chest whatever was on it. The old padre has a side to him that few people see. He said that I needed someone to confide in, and that I was to go to him and vent everything on him whenever I was in the mood. He said, ‘That's what I'm for. God knows what else I'm for!’”

“And did you go?”

“No. I could never bring myself to talk to him again. But it's a kind of support to know that he understands.”

In his faint jealousy Tony immediately applied these words to himself.

“Well, you've told *me* now, old man; and I understand it

all—I swear I do. I—I—well, you know what I mean, don't you ? ”

“ Yes, rather ! ” laughed Kit. “ And thanks awfully.”

“ Well, cheerio.”

“ Cheerio. And don't worry about me. *I'm* all right.”

Tony returned to his bed, but he did not fall asleep for a long time. Though he was hurt for Kit's sake, he was happy too. Amazingly happy at having learned the depth of his friendship for Scrase.

Morning was coming over the sands of Mazar. Very lovely were the November mornings before the sun was high and hot, and while the desert floor lay yellow in the tempered light. The sky was still blue and unblanched, and the scrub patches threw their violet shadows westward. An early morning parade was over, and an early breakfast eaten ; and Tony stood by his bivouac laughing loudly at Childe Harold, who was vigorously bathing his naked body in the public gaze. Harold's bath was a saucer-shaped hole in the sand, which he had lined with his ground-sheet and filled from two canvas buckets of water. Tony tossed handfuls of sand at his gleaming body, and hastily loaded a sponge with water and aimed it with a perfect trajectory at the nape of his neck, and—and then admitted again the aching memory that both his brothers were dead.

Keeping up the laughter as a curtain for his thoughts, he strolled slowly away. His wandering brought him to the horse-lines, where, on a sudden impulse, he borrowed the Transport Sergeant's mare and cantered over the dunes towards the brittle salt-flats that lay to the north of Mazar. Anything was better than mouching about the camp or lolling with his thoughts in his bivouac.

Besides, he had an idea that if he rode far enough he might see the Mediterranean. On the map the line of their advance from Kantara to Mazar had inclined steadily upward towards the Mediterranean, which it designed to meet when it entered the little seaboard town of El Arish ; and here at Mazar, only some twenty miles from El Arish, if you deviated a little to the north, you came to the end of the rolling dunes and found a vast salted plain which looked very much like the beginning

of the sea's marge. It stretched unrelieved to the shimmer along the horizon; and surely, thought Tony, if he were to ride out to that shimmer, or, rather, if by going steadily towards it, he were to push it steadily back, he would unveil the Mediterranean.

To canter on this crunching sand was good; the mare delighted in it, and Tony enjoyed her exulting and his task of holding her in. Quickly the plain behind widened and widened, but not so the stretches in front, which always remained the same; for the shimmer receded at the rate of their advance and never disclosed anything but the same flat plain.

But no! Was that not a mound forming itself in the haze—a little low mound like the hummock at Pelusium? Yes, the mound had disengaged itself from the haze and stood solid on the plain. Now he had something at which to direct his horse's head: he would go as far as that mound, climb it, look about him, and return. Near the mound the sand became soft again, and scrub reappeared, so that he began to suppose that it was only a little range of dunes. Of course! what else had he imagined it might be? Hardly another Pelusium, eighty miles in the desert.

He started at the sight of a human figure. It was coming round a shoulder of the billowing dune. But why start? Another man had as much right as he to feel the beckoning of a far off, isolated hill; and this was a friend—an Australian of the Light Horse—at least he was dressed as one.

The man had perceived his approach, and stood to await him.

"Hallo, digger," he greeted, as Tony cantered up and dismounted. "You aren't a spy, are you?"

"No," answered Tony. "Are you?"

"No. But say: how the devil am I to know if you are speaking the truth or not? Honestly, *are* you a spy?"

"No, I tell you."

"Sure?"

"Yes."

"Well then, I'll talk to you. I think I believe you."

"Same here," said Tony.

"Right. But see: I won't say anything important, in case you really *are* a spy."

"Exactly. Neither will I."

"Good. That's dinkum. Well now: I guess you're another explorer like me."

"Why, is there anything to explore here?"

"*Anything to explore here!*" exclaimed the Australian, as if doubting his ears. "*Anything to explore here!* Didn't you know this was El Flusiat?"

"Never heard of it."

The Australian mentioned the name of his Saviour, and spat.

"Come and see," he said.

He led him round the flank of the hill and pointed.

"There! How's that, eighty miles in the desert?"

Tony was looking upon the ruins of ancient houses. Their lower parts were buried under the sand, and their upper parts, which stood like jagged teeth above the surface, seemed to have been but recently uncovered.

"Some of our fellows have been digging here," the Australian explained.

"Was it a city?"

"Um." This was the Australian's "yes"; and he accompanied it with a nod.

"What was its name?"

"It's called El Flusiat now, but I'm told its name was once Ostracena, and it had its own bishop and all."

"A bishop?" Tony was incredulous.

"Um. Come and see."

He walked Tony another fifty yards over the recently disturbed sand, and again pointed; after which he fell to picking his teeth, that the English officer, at his leisure, might drink in the sight before him.

"Good God!" exclaimed Tony.

"Um," said the Australian.

The whole ground plan of an early Christian basilica lay beneath their eyes: there in parallel rows were the white marble bases on which the arcade of pillars had once stood; here and there lay some of the broken pillars themselves; yonder at the eastern end was a big rectangular block that might have been the altar, and behind it, in a semicircle, ran the tumbled wall of the ambulatory, the sand driven against it and over it.

An inexpressible sadness descended upon Tony as his eyes loitered on the ruins, and as his fancy saw the congregations of fifteen centuries ago singing their hymns among these columns and praising their God. Where were they now? Somewhere in the sand far beneath his feet?

And if in those days they had foreseen their temple thus !

"Gosh ! it's sad, isn't it ?" said Tony.

"Um," admitted the Australian.

A city that was. . . .

Then, as the first warmth of his interest diminished, he felt again the settled ache that was hiding somewhere behind his thoughts and remembered its cause. Keatings. Derek. Time had buried them out of sight, with their ambitions and their gaieties and their pride, as yesterday it had buried the pride of El Flusiat and to-morrow would bury him. . . .

A family that was. . . .

It is not a pretty matter to realize completely the impermanence of everything and the impermanence of oneself ; and now Tony was looking straight into the merciless eyes of this thought—as he had done once or twice in his life before. He looked at it fearlessly and shrugged his shoulders. To what end his present friendship with Kit Scrase ? "Ah well," he said, and turned away.

He exchanged a joke with the Australian—that figure out of the mist whom he would never see again—and mounted his horse and rode home.

They spent a month and more at Mazar, while the railway came up and passed them, and other battalions overlapped their outposts and became the van. But they were waiting for the end of all this. Beyond Mazar the railway could only advance a little way, because, twenty miles on, El Arish faced its approach, and the Turks, if the reports of their activity were correct, were going to fight for El Arish. It was the door to the Holy Land and Syria.

So the 15th at Mazar were full of the expectations of battle, and daily out of the east, along with the dawn, came flights of rumours from the troops in front. But nothing else for a while : Mazar was empty of incident ; only there were the periodic raids at the breakfast hour, the march of scabies among the men, the sudden threat of a cholera outbreak, and, when the tooth of December lengthened, the blinding, maddening sand-storms.

When the sand-storm rioted over Sinai you packed up your face in your blankets and lay prone upon the ground ; and if

at times you dared to uncover your eyes and see how the day went, you saw that all the contours of the desert were changing under the blown sand; it came driving over the cornices of the high dunes in lovely cascades and parabolas, and everywhere the holes were filling up and the hills dwindling. The sun—even the Egyptian noonday sun—had lost its light; a flying veil of sand obscured it, and the day was grey. That was all you saw, for such a glimpse was bought only at the price of sand-stung eyeballs, and you hurriedly buried your face in your blanket again, and breathed as best you could, ever and anon shaking off the weight of sand from your body.

Very suddenly one evening the camp came astir. The signallers were rolling in the telephone wires; the Dump men were sorting stores hastily and blasphemously; officers were conducting rifle and ammunition inspections; two companies were marching in from outpost duty, having abandoned their posts on a sharp order; and the Brigade Major was closeted with the Colonel in his tent. And here—here, by your leave, came a string of French cavalry riding along by the railway. Frenchmen, *mon Dieu!*

What was the game? The signallers, over their rolls of telephone wire, were confidential. They whispered, with nods, that the moment had come for the move on El Arish; but it was a secret, mind you, and so all orders were being carried verbally to the commanding officers. Artillery, cavalry, mountain batteries, camel corps were concentrating in the neighbourhood of Mazar; and the whole ruddy outfit would march forward as an army to-morrow. Yes, the Bikanir Camel Corps had arrived, and the Australian Camel Corps, and the French Cavalry, because we couldn't, for political reasons, enter Syria without the French coming along too. They had to be given a kind of watching brief.

Sacré nom! Tony was delighted—thrilled—and ran off to find Kit Scrase, forgetful for the moment of Kit's fear; forgetful of his own secret ambition; possessed by nothing but a sheer, unexamined excitement.

Was Scrase a little white? Perhaps; but he was giving his orders promptly and efficiently. And when he paused, he turned and asked, "Have you observed what day this is, Bungay?"

"No."

"December the 19th."

"Golly! old man! so it is!"

"It's the anniversary of the evacuation of Suvla, and the last attack on Cape Helles," explained Aylwin, who was standing by.

"We knew that," Scrase suggested cynically.

Tony looked at him. He remembered the 19th of December of a year ago, and all that it had done to Kit, and all that it had caused to himself. To-morrow—were its legacies to mature at last?

CHAPTER VIII

THE LAST MARCH

THE 20th of December in a year long dead, 1916. It saw the most wonderful march, the grandest to the eyes, that Tony had known or would ever know. Who dared deny that war, however it might insult the reason and the conscience, could be beautiful beyond language to the eye—could feed, as nothing else, with many delights some detached, æsthetic hunger in men, which recked nothing of morals or utility or personal gain? All that day the great concentration of forces, in eight or nine parallel columns, went forward over the sand dunes and across the mile-wide sand-flats: whole divisions of infantry in one column, with their transport in another at their side; the brigades of artillery in a third column, every battery of four guns drawn and convoyed over the sands by a hundred and thirty-seven animals; the heavy guns in a fourth column, each single gun dragged on its lumbering caterpillar wheels by no less than thirty-two horses, in eight rows of four abreast; six thousand pack-camels padding along in a fifth column and a sixth and a seventh, their white-gowned Egyptians leading them; beyond, the strings of Ambulance Camels with the hooded stretchers swinging on their flanks; then the splendid turbanned warriors of the Bikanir Corps, and the gay, devil-may-care Anzacs, on their high trotting camels; overhead the guardian aeroplanes wheeling and banking; and all these columns—so wide the desert stretches—coming often into a single view, as they toiled along in clouds of sand and dust; and over the immense picture a brilliant sun which gave precision to every detail—heavens! it bettered the dreams of John the Divine at Patmos. Thousands upon thousands, and more than man could number; nations and languages; men and machines and beasts—so the

Desert Column, its career at a climax, went forward to El Arish, with all its pageantry arrayed.

Singing, joking, inspired, lifted above themselves by the spectacle, the men of the 15th tramped on, in the column that was theirs. The dullest of them felt their minds queerly alight, and needs must shout in jest or song. As for Tony, there was a kind of sparkling ecstasy in his throat; and he sang loudly when the men sang. He sang till his throat was hoarse—and then abruptly—unsought—there shaped themselves in his mind the words, “An army that was.”

All this was but the matter of a day. The twentieth day of December, 1916; and the day was already dying.

The march went on, but Tony had ceased from singing. His column carried him along with it, one very silent thinker. He was thinking of the impermanence and instability of all things, and of the utter loneliness of each human being during his tiny flash of life; how each was hidden away in the dark centre of his thoughts, of which only the fringes were visited by his friends, though they were his dearest. There was Honor his wife—he was feeling now that he wanted her to come very close to him while there was time; and Peggy too, the best of sisters, let them all get very close together and make the most of their little day. He imagined himself speaking to them: “Honor, are we close enough? The time is so short. Peggy, do you remember how Joyce said on that last night before I left for the Dardanelles, ‘We must all live on top of each other when this business is over; because—oh dear, oh dear—I realize more and more as I get so horribly old that nothing matters in life except palliness and human relationships and—well, you know what I mean. . . .’”

Yes, by heaven, he knew what she meant.

He heard again the voices of the men singing. “What did I join the Army for? I must have been bally-well barmy;” and it was as if he had opened closed eyes, for he saw again the parallel columns—infantry, guns, cavalry, and camels—threading onward to the battle, in their clouds of sand and dust. And sharply he remembered that the morrow might give him the chance for which he had longed—the chance to perform an echoing deed and lay a lie for ever.

Was he so eager to do it now—now that he could see how his own death would complete the pain of his family—now when he felt that nothing mattered except that dear closeness

which he was planning for the days after the war? Would he go out of his way to meet it? No. . . . Wait, though. Remember Moulden. Remember Moulden talking to Aylwin and Wimborne. Oh, yes, he would, he would. He *must*. "I can't help it. . . . Just let me by one wild risky deed put Moulden to shame, and I'll worry no more. After that I'll take all reasonable care, for everyone's sake. . . ."

One more sin, said Ulysses, and then I will be good.

The infantry halted twice an hour, but the camels went steadily on; so that at twilight, when the 15th were reaching the position which would be the sally-port for the attack, the camels had long been out of sight. But now a most displeasing odour was filling the air; and it thickened as they marched into it. Rounding the profile of a dune, they learned what it was. All the six thousand camels had been parked here in long lines with their white-gowned Gypsies among them, one to each string of three; and the conglomerate smell of six thousand pack-camels, with two thousand Gypsies mingling their handsome quota in the general sum, was as unacceptable an experience as the men of the 15th—even the oldest veterans—had been invited to endure. They marched past the camels, cursing and spitting and calling upon Allah.

"Well, that's aboot blown the gaff, any road," shouted Jim Stott. "The Turk'll know we're coomin' now. He's not above ten mile off."

"*Wur!*, it'll save us a fight anyway," answered the voice of Joe Wylie. "Johnny can't stand this. He'll run. See, boys, we're smokin' 'im aht."

"Well, Ah reckon it's not fighting fair," said Jim Stott.

"Gahn!" called Art Webster. "Johnny won't run. 'E won't even notice it. He smells the same hisself."

They left the camel park behind and entered a long drooping valley between two steep slopes of scrub-covered sand. Here the vast host of infantry that had gone before them was already at rest, their arms piled and horses tethered in line upon line across the valley floor. Far in front, at the mouth of the valley, the cavalry and artillery were parking limbers, guns and horses in similar parallel lines. When the companies of the 15th had filed into their allotted lines, and the officers were

going to their quarters high on one of the slopes, Tony glanced about him and significantly sniffed. Eyes and nostrils were telling him that he had reached at last the far fringe of the desert. There was a scent of green things here—faint, but wonderfully suggestive after its year of absence—and see! the sands were growing a curious kind of lily, colourless and crinkled by the sun, but a hint of better things, nevertheless. Scrase, what ho! the desert blossoms!

All agreed that here was a slight but undeniable change in the desert's face, and Aylwin, who had set up as an Authority on the Natural History of Sinai, gave an account of his feelings on the march as he noticed the multiplying prints of wagtail, pigeon, quail and desert lark.

"Yes, we're getting very near the land flowing with milk and honey," said Tony.

"Of course we are," said the naturalist. "Isn't El Arish its border town? To-morrow, after capturing it, we shall only have to walk across the Wady El Arish and we shall be standing in the Promised Land."

"Go on!" exclaimed Scrase. "Fancy that now! Did you know that, Bungay?"

"El Arish was the Rhinocolura of the Ancient World," continued Aylwin, unabashed. "I'm looking forward to seeing it to-morrow."

Childe Harold gaped at the name.

"Well, I hope it keeps fine for you," he said.

The night was upon them or ever the last arms were piled. And like all Egyptian nights, it was cold. Down on the valley floor every group of a dozen men made a scrub-fire, which flared and crackled and shot up in showers of sparks. Round these they gathered and sang Christmas carols and sentimental songs; it wanted only five days to Christmas. The drinking songs followed: "Here's good health to the quart pot, pint pot, gill pot—have a drop, little drop more——" and most stirring of all on that battle eve: "For to-night we'll merry be, to-morrow we'll be sober."

The ecstasy was in Tony's throat again. To lie on the slope of a hill and look down upon line after line of camp-fires whose glare lit the concave plain and reflected itself on the piled arms and the gun-wheels and the horses' flanks and the faces of singing men, while songs came up with the rose-dyed smoke, and the horses champed—this was the game of war as the gods designed

it. You in France, with your underground moling, could keep your wretched travesty. Who would stay immobile in a muddy trench when he could be camping at large under the desert sky and before the gates of El Arish?

Moulden came up to Tony, and looked down upon him. A half-smile played upon his harried, ambiguous face. It was exceedingly uncomfortable to be approached by Moulden like this. There were times when Moulden's expression, since you could not read its meaning, left you in that embarrassment which comes when someone asks you a question which you would fain answer to his satisfaction but do not know the answer he desires; and so you can only stare back at him, and try to appear at ease. Tony did this now; aware of an awkward grin on his own face, and ashamed of it. Moulden and he had long since agreed, by tacit advances to each other, to bury their quarrel out of sight; but they still fled each other, whenever possible, and nursed their nerves in the security of separation. And Tony now, his heart ever so slightly quickened, wished that Moulden would explain this approach and go away.

"Do you mind if I talk to you a minute, O'Grogan," said Moulden.

"Not at all. Sit down."

Moulden, however, did not sit down; he turned his eyes adrift and gazed at the soldiers encamped in the valley.

"D'you know, I just wanted to say——" he emitted an uneasy laugh—"h'm, it's really rather difficult—really." His face twisted.

"Well, let's have it," said Tony, laughing in return.

"Well, you see anything may happen, of course, to-morrow, and—and I've been thinking I'd like to feel absolutely friendly with you—I mean, absolutely *quite* friendly before—in case anything happens to either of us—and I want to apologize for something. I want to be perfectly plain and above board, if you'll let me——"

(Oh my gosh, what a gift this man had of doing the wrong thing and doing it badly, so that his listeners suffered!)

"It's not easy for a fellow to confess something, is it?" said Moulden, his eyes disconcertingly fixed on Tony's.

"No," said Tony, having nothing else to say.

"No, but after thinking it all over, I'm going to do it. I suppose you'll admit that, from the first—somehow or other—we rather failed to hit it off together, didn't we?"

Tony admitted nothing; he held his peace, he was so uncomfortable.

"But honestly, I didn't bear any malice against you, and I think you misconstrued a lot of things that I said and did; but after that time when you came and were rude to me in my cabin—you were rather rude, really, if you remember—well then I really did feel vindictive against you. I should have done better if I'd had it out with you at once, because these things fester if they're bottled up, don't they? but I didn't—stupidly enough—and I think it's possible I've let myself be a bit unfair to you in my talk—one *does*, you know—and I should feel much happier if I could put it all right before to-morrow, see?"

(Oh God, this was awful.)

"Oh, don't worry about that," said Tony. "It hasn't worried me. At least, if it did at first, I've forgotten all about it."

(What a lie! Oh, why wouldn't the fellow go away?)

"No, but I feel that, if I've done anything to injure you, I should like to apologize for it. I should, really."

"Thanks," said Tony. "And same here, of course."

"Thanks. . . ."

"So we're good friends now, O'Grogan?"

"Yes, yes. Of course."

And since Moulden did not speak, Tony added, "That's all right, old man."

"Good! I'm frightfully glad about this—really. And I've long wanted to say how sorry I was about your two brothers. It's terrible—really. I would have spoken at the time, only I didn't know if you'd welcome it, see?"

Tony looked up, surprised.

"How did you know anything about them?"

"Oh, someone saw it in the paper. We've known about it for a long time now, but Scrase concluded from your silence, that you'd rather we kept quiet about it."

"How like old Kit!"

"Yes, and he was quite upset about it, really—I believe."

There was a silence.

"Well, I'm frightfully grateful to you for this conversation," said Moulden, moving at last to go.

(Thank God.)

"Oh, that's nothing, old man. Thank *you*."

"Well, good-night."

"Good-night."

Allah! what a scene! "One part sincere and three parts histrionic," was Tony's measurement of it, "and the whole a very unpalatable draught;" though he was ready to allow that in the tortuous places of Moulden's soul the lights were too dim for him to analyse the mixture he had brewed. And, anyhow, it was impotent to heal the low-lying tumour which ate in Tony's thoughts, impairing, however faintly, all his happiness. A private apology from Moulden left the Brigade a-whisper still. No, his ache could only be rooted out when, by some dazzling action, he converted the whispered calumny into shouted applause. And Moulden must see it done. Moulden must watch him sipping the sweets of a triumph over him.

To-morrow, perhaps.

He lay and dreamed; he dreamed of what he would do to-morrow; and as he looked down upon the field of fires below and heard the songs, he dreamed of epic poems he would one day write, though he suspected he would be too lazy ever to write them. At 20.30 all lights and fires were put out, and the roofless city below him with its thousands and thousands of sleepers became gradually silent and invisible, as the embers died. Only the horses champed and pawed the ground. Above him the stars were brilliant: the Milky Way arched like a bow over the outspread army, and Orion slanted behind the ridge of the opposite hill. Childe Harold, who lay near him in a hole, slept heavily, his snores muffled in his blanket. Harold could sleep, because he lived for the moment only, free as a child from speculation or care; a little further away Scrase lay sleeping too, but restlessly.

For his own part he found the night much too interesting for sleep; and long after midnight he sat up, with his blanket over his head like the veil of a Mahomedan lady, and lit a cigarette. And the first thing he saw was a large and uncannily brilliant star hanging low in the east, over the Holy Land. He had heard of this star; those who watched in the small hours had spoken of it, and the romantic among them said that it was the Star of Bethlehem, the star that the Magi saw. Well, it must be to-morrow now. What had the day in wait for him? If only his great opportunity was to come to-day. He wanted it—aye—even at the price of death. And he *felt* somehow that

it was coming to-day; he persuaded himself that he had a presentiment of its coming. And on this most stimulating thought he had just lit another cigarette when he heard much movement among the cavalry far away in the valley's mouth. They were saddling their horses, undoubtedly; and the shouted orders of their officers had a note of urgency. What were they up to? Now they were riding out of the valley, and hark! unless his imagination were playing him a trick, they were hurrying eastward towards the enemy, some at a canter and some at a gallop.

Now what could that move have meant? Lying down again to think over it, he carried the problem down into his sleep and lost it there.

Next morning the infantry marched into El Arish without firing a shot. The Turks, surprised by the suddenness of the British march and the power with which they had come, had scuttled amain from their prepared positions and retreated eastwards. The British cavalry had gone out early in the morning to ring round the town and to follow up the enemy.

Unhurrying, the 15th padded into the midst of a little congregation of white Oriental houses, that, sprawling down a hill-side, called to mind the pictures of Nazareth or Bethlehem. Only women and young children watched them. And these sad-eyed Rachels, with the pitchers on their heads, heard the impudent gallantries shouted in the language of England's streets—"How art going, lass?" from Jim Stott. "Bonn joor"—and gazed uncomprehending; but the little brown boys met the flippancies and grimaces with an answering grin, and even exploited the hour by begging for *baksbish*. The men were happy. Disappointed at first to have been denied a fight, they saw now that the great spectacular march of yesterday had been the battle, and this was their triumph: so they hid their satisfaction and grumbled; they grumbled about this Eastern warfare where the cavalry got all the fun while the infantry did all the work, and they loudly wished that they might be sent to France where the infantry were the boys and the cavalry skulked behind.

Tony's disappointment was deeper, but he marched on with the rest, laughing. He was getting inured to these blows.

Damn ! it really looked as if the fates were against him. At Romani his chance had slipped from his reach just as he marched up to it ; and now at El Arish it had eluded him again. But never mind ; the war was still only two years old and his day would come.

Thinking thus, he suddenly remembered Kit Scrase ; and he decided to lose all disappointment in joy that Kit had been granted a reprieve again—Kit, his friend who had confided in him. Gosh, how much better one felt when one escaped for a while from the deathless egotism into thoughts of someone else !

Yes, he was excitedly happy this morning. He had caught the high exhilaration of the troops, when long months of labouring across the resisting sands were crowned with a bloodless victory ; when the desert was behind them, and a town of houses around them ; when women, no matter how quaint and alien, looked into their eyes, and children ran beside their march ; when the gulls, perching on the roofs, spoke of the nearness of the sea and, to be sure, the roar of the Mediterranean was in everyone's ears ; when the Wady El Arish, fringed with trees, suddenly came full into view, and they cheered, because they knew that they had only to stroll across its dry bed and they would shake off Egypt from their feet and stand in the borders of the Holy Land. Aye, truly, about the morning there was all the air of a Grand Finale.

And for them it *was* a Grand Finale. They had spent but a few days in their new camp, bathing in the Mediterranean, playing with the children, helping the women draw water from the wells, and offering unlimited sugar (which was scarce in England at the time) to the domestic camels and donkeys and goats and doves ; Christmas was hardly past and the year was still two days from its death when the word " France " went racing among the men and formed them everywhere into excited and chattering groups. The whole division, said the chatterers, was to be moved from this part of Egypt : not a doubt of it. A job in Sinai was done ; other men would carry the war into the Holy Land ; and themselves could be spared. The Quartermaster's boys had had it from the R.T.O. that on Tuesday next eight trains would be waiting to take a great portion of them right back to Kantara. From Kantara they were to march to Moascar, where the division would concentrate ; and what did that mean if not transportation by sea,

and—France? Salonica?—stuff! don't you believe it! Salonica?—thump! There was nothing doing there. It was France. And they weren't sorry, neither. Fed up with chasing Turks and scavenging up the desert. It was time they became soldiers.

Scrase brought the news into C Company's mess, their little Indian tent.

"It's France, children. Now we're really going to war."

"How do you know?" said Moulden.

"C.O.'s just told me."

"Well, hurray!" said Tony.

"Eggs-actly!" agreed Childe Harold. "I'm quite keen on fighting someone for a change."

"I'm not," Scrase laughed. "I've no quarrel with El Arish. Seems to me a pleasant spot: sea view—sea bathing——"

"Same here," announced Moulden.

"Same here," Aylwin said. "I'm too proud to fight."

And Tony would have liked to associate himself with the jest, but remembered that for him it would be unwise.

"Oh yes, but you lads have seen the war on Gallipoli," continued Childe Harold. "I haven't. And I'd like to have a squint at it before I die."

"You'll see more than you want of it, in a month or two," suggested Scrase.

"No, I shan't. As soon as I've seen enough, I shall cock my leg over the parapet and hold it there till it stops a Blighty; and then I'll take it home and show it to the family."

"Which reminds me," screamed Aylwin, not with his usual dignity, but as if he were in an apocalyptic ecstasy: "we shall get leave, we shall get leave, we shall get leave;" and he hammered each joyous repetition on to the table.

Hughes Anson came hurrying in with Quickshaw.

"France, boys," said he. "Here's Padre got it straight from Division, and what are padres for if it's not to get us the news? We leave for France to-morrow."

"Tell us something we don't know, Rosy," said Aylwin.

"Right you are, curse your father. Aylwin's a self-opinionated little ass—you didn't know that, did you? And altogether you C blokes are a piffing crowd, Allah destroy you. C Company's easily the worst in the battalion. Did you know that?"

"Oh yes, we knew that," said Aylwin.

"But of course," conceded Hughes, "it's Allah's will that you should be so, so it's hardly your fault. Allah is greatest."

Childe Harold gazed up at him, unangrily.

"Ain't he witty? Anything more to tell us?"

"No, except that you'll all be dead in six months."

"No doubt," agreed the Childe. "Have a spot of whisky?"

"Don't mind if I do. . . . Thanks. May your wealth increase. . . . Yes, all dead and then you'll wish you were back in El Arish." He drank the half of his ration.

"Never mind," said the Childe, now ministering to his own cup. "Quickshaw'll bury us. It'll give him a job of work for a change. These padres have too lazy a life altogether. *I'm* going to be a padre in the next war."

"No," pronounced Hughes. "Quickshaw'll be dead too. Allah is merciful. Last padre I heard of who went to France was killed almost at once. Trod on a land mine, the silly goat. Yes, and he went up to heaven like Elijah sitting on a cloud."

"Confound it, Hughes," objected Moulden. "Tell us about someone who went to France and *lived*, will you?"

"Well, you needn't worry about *me*," Quickshaw interpolated. "I think I shall go home, now that we're going to France. I reckon I've had about enough of this."

"Oh no, padre; no, padre," all protested. "Mustn't desert us in our hour of need."

"Pooh! I shan't break my heart about *you*," scoffed Quickshaw.

"Curse his father," said Hughes.

"But frankly, Rosy," pursued the Childe, sitting with a knee grasped in both hands, "just tell these gentlemen, will you—you who have been to France (and God help us, you blow off enough about it!)—tell us what are the chances of going to the pleasant spot and still remaining on the earth."

"Practically none," Hughes answered promptly, and drank again and wiped his mouth. "Don't you think so, padre?"

Quickshaw nodded. "Not much chance," he said.

"Of course not. Isn't that why I came away?"

"Well, then, here's to it," said the Childe, reaching for the bottle.

"No, practically none for a junior sub, that is," corrected Hughes, and took another sip. "I don't mind telling you that I expect to get through it myself; now that I'm a captain, but you—pooh!—I wouldn't give twopence for your chances."

"I wonder who'll succeed you in the command of A Company," said the unperturbed Harold, into his mug. "I've a sort of feeling that *I* shall."

"*You?* Pfool!" sneered Hughes. "Foul offspring of a race of swine! Give me some more whisky. . . . Thank you. *Thank* you. May your night be happy and blessed. . . ."

Altogether it was a very hearty conversation. And two days later a procession of trains rolled westward, the trucks packed with the heartiest men, whose singing echoed in the empty dunes and whose songs became cheers each time they rolled into a station that themselves had helped to make. Mazar—Bir-el-Abd—Romani: in a single day the train rolled them down a track they had given months and months to building. What an ironical cheer for the old Pipe-line, which was still lagging miles behind the army! "Oh, oh, oh, it's a lovely war." What gratuitous mimicry for each gang of grinning Arabs whom they passed at work upon the permanent way! "Aye-yah-la! Aye-yah-la! Aye-yah-la!" What laughter for the stone offices which the Gypsy State Railways were now building at the stations which themselves had guarded. "Blimey! looks as though they thought the railway'd stand up." Darkness was down on the scrub while they were still this side of Pelusium; and in the darkness what were they to do but troll their songs, if, perhaps, more gently. "The roses round the door, Make me love mother more. I shall see my sweet-heart Flo, And girls I used to know. . . ." Pelusium behind. "Good-bye-ee, good-bye-ee. Wipe the tear, baby dear, from your eye-ee. . . ." On through the darkness to Kantara, with a fountain of sparks and flame-hued smoke blowing from the funnel ahead like a banner. And beyond Kantara—France! "I miss the rooster, The one that useter Wake me up at four a.m." "*Put that light out!*"—Joe Wylie's voice to the banner of sparks, and a roar of laughter. "Pack up your troubles in your old kit-bag, and smile, smile, smile! While you've a lucifer to light your fag, smile boys, that's the style. What's the use of worrying, it never was worth while. . . ."

O perished voices, that might not abide with us. Never a music shall visit our hearts like your music, blithe souls of yesterday. There, in the dusks of yesterday, you are singing still.

PART III

CHAPTER I

THE BILLETRIX AND THE BATMEN

THE 15th Royal West Essex met the France of 1917 when they found themselves billeted in a little village twenty-five miles behind the old Somme battlefield. The officers of C Company, perhaps, met France at its best. France, in the person of Madame Liercourt, welcomed them into her cottage, and on the whole was very good to them, if peevish at times. They called Madame Liercourt the Billetrix. She was a peasant woman of fifty, very large and round. Scrase, after paying her the first civilities and watching her massy hips retire through a door, described her with the words *rotonde immense*, for Scrase, since his arrival in France, had discovered to his friends an unexpected but not unamiable weakness for parading his French. The phrase *rotonde immense* impressed Childe Harold very favourably, who reflected on it for a space and then, pretending to a perfect understanding, said, "*Wee, wee, mon capitaine ; oh, wee, wee ;*" and again, with a Parisian shrug of his shoulders, "*Oh, mais wee, mais wee.*" Moulden laughed, though he understood no French at all. Moulden's ignorance of French, even of its pronunciation, was a perpetual irritant to Tony ; not, of course, because it proved that Moulden had enjoyed very few advantages in his life, but because it disproved all the lies he had told about his private school education, and he seemed to lack the intelligence to see that it disproved them. Pretentiousness is an irritant at any time, but when pointed by stupidity it is intolerable.

The Billetrix was dressed in a blouse and a short skirt that, hanging from her wide hips, reached no further than just below her calves ; and her feet and ankles were encased in man's boots much too large for her. "All French peasants' skirts are short like that," said Harold wisely ; and Aylwin

corrected him, saying it wasn't a skirt at all but a petticoat, whereat Harold rebuked him for knowing anything about such matters. But petticoat or not, the lady wore it in the rooms of her cottage and in the streets and fields of her village.

Madame the Billetrix had a tall husband ; and a son, a huge farm lad of sixteen years. Wife and husband were remarkable for having, both of them, the right eye permanently closed. "I'd like to have seen that fight," said the Childe. But he made this humorous remark before they properly knew the Billetrix and her good heart. After a week of her clumsy kindness they believed the villagers, who told them that Monsieur Liercourt and Madame his wife had but one eye apiece when they married. Young Liercourt had two eyes ; and two fine bright ones at that.

If Madame the Billetrix and Messieurs her menfolk were large, the billet was small. The street door ushered the visitor into the Living-room, upon which two tiny bedrooms opened and a tiny kitchen ; and next to the kitchen there was a narrow barn. One roof covered all this, and a garden of vegetables surrounded it. In the day time the five officers messed in the Living-room ; the five batmen cooked and messed in the tiny kitchen ; Monsieur Liercourt and the boy had their meal on the farm where they laboured ; and poor Madame found a corner of the kitchen fire where she could cook her panful of coffee, and a few inches of kitchen table where she could place her porringer and spoon.

Madame was very shrill and noisy, as she sat in the kitchen with the five batmen around her. Of her courtesy she talked to them in that pidgin-French, that *lingua franca* which had been left with her by the hundreds of English "tommees" who had passed this way before. Her talk was naturally loud, and since she imagined, like the batmen and all simple people, that unintelligible words would be better understood if they were shouted louder and louder, a very large proportion of her conversation came through the closed door of the kitchen to the officers messing in the Living-room. Her "*Très bon ! Très bon !*" was shrieked with delight as she grasped the meaning of some nonsensical tale told her by Joe Wylie or Art Webster. Her question "*Compris ? Compris ?*" when she desired to know whether her French-English had been understood was for ever shrilling like a bird-call above the gabble in the kitchen.

At times the gabble became a din. One day Scrase, indignant at such uncontrolled mirth among the batmen, walked towards the kitchen to establish order. He opened the door and said, "*Bonjour, Madame,*" and, having looked ineptly round, added "*Il fait beau temps, n'est-ce pas ?*" He and Madame passed the time of day in a few more helpless sentences, whereupon he closed the door and returned to his seat.

"I suppose it's a shame to shut 'em up," he said. "The old lady's got the boys all round her like a hen with her chickens ; and Joe Wylie's telling her some villainous pothouse yarn, at which she's rocking with laughter."

"Listen !" said Childe Harold.

For at that moment the Billetrix's high notes were heard shrieking emphatically, as she grasped the point of Joe Wylie's story : "*Ab, oui, ab, oui ! Très bon. Très bon. J'ai compris.*"

"*Wee, wee, tray bong,*" corroborated Joe's rich voice ; and he began to serenade her with a slow drawl of "Sing me to sleep, the shadows fall," breaking off to inquire : "*Compree 'sing,' Murdamme ?*" And, to illustrate the meaning given by the English to the word "sing," he trilled up and down the whole compass of his voice.

"*Ab oui ! Très bon. Très bon !*" shouted the Billetrix. "*Compris 'sing,'*"

"And 'sleep' ? *Compree 'sleep' ?*" It was Joe speaking again ; and a snore suggested his pantomime.

"Ha-ha-ha !" laughed Madame. "*Oui. Compris 'sleep.'*"

The rest of the linguistic obstacles having been smoothed out, one by one and very noisily, the whole song was sung to her in chorus by the men ; after which her hands smacked together in vigorous applause and her laughter filled the cottage.

Then it seemed that Joe was asking her a very personal question for the laughter of the other batmen grew so riotous that it set all the listening officers laughing too. They caught the words "*Manger*" and "*Frogs.*" Abruptly the uproar ceased, and a silence fell in the kitchen, followed by the noise of feet jumping along the brick floor, and peals of laughter from the batmen.

"*Oui. Beaucoup de grenouilles,*" shouted Madame in the most delighted voice of all. "*Manger des grenouilles. Très bon. Vary good——*"

"What's *greno-wee* ?" Art Webster's voice interrupted. "*Nong compree greno-wee ?*"

"*Comme ça ! Comme ça !*" screamed Madame. And again the officers caught the sound of feet jumping along the kitchen floor.

Not in anger, but to satisfy his curiosity, Scrase went again to the kitchen door and opened it. He saw Madame in a great perspiration, sitting upon her heels and jumping from spot to spot on the floor. Around her stood the batmen in amazed appreciation. On seeing an officer at the door she rose to an upright position, and falling, very hot and tired, into the chair by the fire, began a rapid and voluble explanation that was too difficult for Scrase to follow. It was not to be suffered that the batmen should think him defeated by Madame's French, so he felt he must make some show of conversing with her.

"*Vous avez une grande famille maintenant, n'est-ce pas, Madame,*" said he.

"*Ab oui,*" the lady replied breathlessly. "Plenty 'piccaninny' *maintenant*——" The *Bon Dieu* alone knew from what itinerant English voice, as it chaffed the children of the village, she had caught this curious word—" *Très bons piccaninnies.*"

"*J'espère qu'ils ne sont pas méchants,*" suggested Scrase, and immediately blushed for his facetiousness ; but he had wanted to say something in French, and these had been the first words that occurred to him.

"*Mais non, mon capitaine,*" she answered, as she wiped the tears of laughter from her open eye and from her closed one as well. "*Mais non. Tous les soldats Anglais sont très gentils.*"

"She gives you a good character," Scrase explained learnedly to the batmen.

"Yes, sir," replied the servants, who had witnessed with reverence the O.C.'s astonishing command of the French language.

"Well, then, don't make such a ghastly row in here. *Bonjour, Madame.*"

"*Bonjour, Monsieur.*"

Scrase shut the door and returned to his place.

"Madame's scarcely dignified," he said. "She's at present appearing in the character of a frog. But she's a good-natured old soul. Pity they're not all like her in France."

Before the others could reply Joe Wylie had opened the kitchen door and was standing in the room.

"Please, sir. Will you be wanting any letters posted?"

"No, Wylie, I don't think so," said Scrase, surprised at this dutifulness.

"Thank you, sir. . . . And please, sir, is there any word in French for slugs?"

"I suppose so, Wylie. But I don't know it. . . . Ask Mr. Moulden," added Scrase, who was never above the mischief of prodding at Moulden's lath-and-plaster shams.

Moulden didn't wait to be asked.

"I'm sure I haven't any idea," he laughed. "I've never had occasion to talk about slugs in France—really"—which was truer than he intended.

"No, sir?" Joe acknowledged.

"*Vers* is the word for worms," interposed the Childe, who suspected that the name of any unpleasant animal, moist and crawling, would meet Joe Wylie's need." "Will *vers* do for you, Wylie?"

"What, sir?"

"*Vers*. Worms."

"Thank you, sir. *Vair*?"

"Yes."

"*Vair*, sir?"

"That's right."

"Thank you, sir. That'll do me nicely." And Joe's long forefinger showed a tendency to go to his moustache, for the eclipsing of a grin. "There's nothing else you gen'l'men'll be requiring jest now, is there, sir?"

"No," said Scrase, to whom Joe had turned. "I think not, Wylie."

"Thank you, sir."

And he took himself and his new information into the kitchen, where—so they guessed from the laughter that arose—he put his knowledge to the best possible use of knowledge, namely, to amuse and make happy his fellow men. "*Mangez vers, Murdamme?*" they heard, and Madame's loud laugh: "*Non, non*. Not good, not good."

"*Wee, wee*. Damn good!" protested Joe Wylie and Art Webster.

In the first days of their stay in Madame Liercourt's cottage, they thought that her good nature was of the absolute type

which never allows its possessor to be ill-tempered or querulous. But there came a dull cold morning when they perceived, as they sat at breakfast, that Madame was ruffled. With the abruptness of a person who is annoyed and wishes her annoyance to be known she walked back and forth from the Living-room to the Kitchen, slightly slamming the door each time; she rummaged in cupboards, whispering and sobbing to herself; she fussed at the fire when the officers had huddled around it to enjoy their after-breakfast pipes; and she paused sometimes to raise her apron and wipe her one eye.

The five officers could only glance at one another in impotent dismay.

"Good lord," said Harold with a glance at the large form of Madame before her cupboard door, "the old lady's got the almighty pip about something."

He said this aloud, thinking that his English slang would be meaningless to the Billetrix. But she heaved about the room, softly keening: "*J'ai compris ce que vous avez dit—'old lady.'*"

"Hush! She understood you," warned Tony.

Childe Harold's face coloured deeply as only a young face can. Like many English public-school boys who make a fine show of impudence, he was at heart a shy and nervously considerate creature; and the thought that he had hurt a woman of the poor sent the blood mounting to his fair hair. "Oh dammit!" he muttered. . . . "Oh hell! Somebody say something nice to her. Scrase, have a shot."

"*Nous sommes bien fâchés de vous déranger, Madame,*" Scrase ventured.

"*Ah vous ne me dérangez pas, mon capitaine,*" moaned the Billetrix, her kindness flashing out from her gloom like the sun on a threatening day.

"Oh yes, I'm afraid we do," said Scrase. "*Je crains que nous—*"

Then Madame poured out her trouble, standing above them with her apron in one hand.

"The tommees occupy all the fire in the kitchen with their cooking, and these Messieurs surround the fire here. I have not place where I can put my little saucepan. To-day my husband will return and I cannot cook his little morsel of meat. It becomes quickly bad in the armoire. I would like that you be comfortable, but *moi*, I have not place anywhere. And

the weather is warm no more, and I am vary cold. If it were warm, I would sit tranquilly in the garden, but this is not possible."

Scrase jumped up with military decision. Now he knew where he was, and what to do. He flung open the kitchen door and stormed at the batmen.

"Look here, what the hell do you mean by crowding round the kitchen fire and not giving Madame room to cook her dinner? Clear out from the fire, I tell you. Take those bloody dixies and make a fire for yourselves in the garden. Wylie, get some of the ration fuel and see that Madame has a blazing fire for herself. The more she does for you, the less you consider her.

"*Non, non*," screamed Madame, rushing to the aid of the bombarded garrison. "The tommees are vary good—*très bon, très bon. J'ai beaucoup de place* if I have a very little corner of the kitchen fire. It is necessary that they repose where they are."

Scrase, again bewildered, abandoned his attack on the servants and withdrew to his chair defeated. Childe Harold, seemingly, became possessed of a happy notion, and jumped up and placed the Company's gramophone on the table. He knew that the Billetrix always enjoyed this grampophone. It had been a fine instrument once, but nowadays its spring was somewhat war-weary and most of its records (as the Childe said) were "missing, believed killed." However, he started a seedy record on its merry-go-round, and a tune scratched in the room. Madame placed her hands on her hips and listened.

"You sing, Madame?" asked Scrase, hopelessly at a loss for something to say, but anxious to maintain the lightened atmosphere.

"Ah, before the war I often sing. But now—no more. *C'est la guerre.*"

The tune continued wearily.

"But you will sing again," Scrase pursued. "*Après la Victoire.*"

"*Ah non.* But I like your English songs. It is now two years since the soldiers begin to be billeted upon me. For six months the Poilus come and they occupy this room. Ever since then the English tommees come. Since eighteen months they come, and after a few days they go. Soon you quit my house, and others come and sit round the fire. But always

they sing their sad English songs : ' Zares a long, long trail a-finding. . . ' *Très bon. Très bon. Vary good.*"

And Madame laughed heartily while the gramophone plodded to the end of its scratchy tune.

Harold put on another record ; and the gramophone played to Madame Liercourt, " When you come home, dear, when you come home. . . ."

" You are very good to our batmen, Madame," said Scrase. "*Nos soldats disent que vous êtes bien aimable.*"

" Ah, I have not always been so, *mon capitaine*. For many months I was very tired of the soldiers who occupied my home and left no place for my husband, my son and myself. I grumbled and scolded. But I had an elder son in the trenches at Verdun, and one day I hear that my son is *mort*. *Compris ' mort,' Messieurs ?*"

" Yes, we *compris ' mort,'*" said Scrase, grimly.

" *Oui, monsieur*. I hear that my child is dead. I suffer much, and all the while the English soldiers come and go. My soldier is dead. Since then I have learned to be very gentle with soldiers."

The Billetrix wiped her eye with a corner of her apron, while Childe Harold gazed into the fire, and Tony stared down at his feet, and Scrase, with his finger tips on the table, tapped out the tune of the gramophone as it played on heedlessly : " When you come home at eventide."

" *C'est très triste, Madame,*" said Scrase at last.

" Ah !" The Billetrix shrugged her shoulders. "*C'est la guerre*. It is the same thing in all the village. Madame Huppy has lost her husband ; Madame Pont Remy her two boys. The son of Madame Doudelain is missing. Soon they will call up Georges my son. He has only sixteen years, but he is so big."

" No, no," Scrase demurred. " We're just going to finish up the war. That's what we've come for."

" The good God grant it," said the Billetrix. " But take care, *mon capitaine*, and return safe. You English officers are only boys. *Le jeune officier là—c'est un petit—n'est-ce pas ?* And your soldiers are but boys. *Voyez-vous*, I have learned to be gentle with soldiers. But sometimes I am impatient and unkind. I forget how young are you all. I have been so this morning. *Pardon, mon capitaine. Pardon, Messieurs.*"

Two mornings later the battalion paraded in the Place. They

moved to the right in column of fours and took the road that, winding past Madame Liercourt's gate, shot away in a straight white ribbon, its poplars guarding it, over the fields and up towards the line. The children outside the École Communale shouted and waved; the girls at the windows kissed their hands; the widows wept a little into very clean handkerchiefs, and the old curé smiled and bowed, and—who could doubt it?—whispered his benediction.

When the column passed Madame Liercourt's cottage it was whistling; and Joe Wylie and his comrades, rifles slung at ease and steel helmets pushed back, had their "eyes left" that they might wink their adieux to the Billetrix at her gate. As Joe caught her eye he began to serenade her with, "Sing me to sleep, the shadows fall;" and she clapped and laughed and shouted "*Très bon. Très bon.*" Art Webster called out, "Compree 'frogs,' Madame?" and she doubled up with laughter: "Ha-ha-ha. *Mangez des grenouilles? Beaucoup de grenouilles.* Vary good." And Joe kissed his hand to her, and she pretended to be coy. And then the batmen were too far past to speak with her any more, so they turned their eyes front and joined in the general whistling and helped to carry it over the hill.

That was the last of the 15th Royal West Essex for Madame the Billetrix; and the last, they supposed, that they would hear of her. But it chanced that Aylwin was left behind to clean up the village, and he told the others in the evening that, when he passed the cottage, he saw the Billeting Officer of a new battalion talking with Madame Liercourt on her threshold. This stranger was asking her, shyly and apologetically as if nervous of a refusal, whether she could accommodate some company officers and their batmen; and the Billetrix was replying encouragingly, as if in wonder at his hesitation: "*Mais oui, Monsieur.* Plenty room. *Très bon.*"

CHAPTER II

SPRING AND SUMMER

THEIR first sector in the trenches was a quiet one. The war was quiet just now, both sides playing for position. Russia had gone out of the fight and was busying herself with her Revolution; but almost at once, as if this major crisis had decided her, America had come in on the side of the Allies. It was the spring of 1917, and the Germans had retreated upon the Hindenburg Line, so the 15th marched away from Madame Liercourt's village to a station, whence a train carried them over the old Somme battlefield and across the territory now recovered for France and into the ruins of Péronne.

This journey was Tony's first approach to the quint-essential War, which, as he had always perceived, was neither Gallipoli nor Sinai, but France; and he sat in his carriage, thrilled, with a map upon his knees. First they traversed the places where, in the days before the fighting settled down to trench warfare, the Germans had advanced on Paris, only to be thrown back. Here the few shell-holes had long ago silted up with mud, and were ablow with grass and flowers, and the old trench system was no more than a string of wounds that had healed into scars. This belt was a green belt. Then the train rolled callously over the actual trench lines where the two nations had faced each other for twenty months till they came to grips in the battle of the Somme. On Tony's map this belt was marked by a red line, but on the soil of France it was marked by shell-holes as close together as the holes in wire-netting; by trenches pulverized into ribbons of shapeless dust; by woods razed down to a bristle of splintered and cindered trunks; and by villages pestled into mounds of brick-rubble. Under the spring sun it was a yellow, dusty belt. Then they clanked over a third belt—

the country just evacuated by the Germans ; and here Tony suffered emotions that surprised him. He who in his arguments at least had contended that the Boche soldiers were as brave and pitiable as our own, now felt an unreasonable vindictiveness constricting his heart.

The desolation of the Somme battlefield had not moved him so. But about the destruction now beneath his eyes there seemed a wantonness, a sullenness, a remorselessness ; and it set him gloating over thoughts of a remorseless revenge. These villages and towns so gutted, silent and empty ! These dwellings, town halls, schools and hotels all open to the sky. War, no doubt, but by God, then, let it be war ! He rejoiced in the ceaseless roll and tremble of the English guns, which were sounding nearer every minute. When at Péronne they descended from the train, and marched by the ramparts of the stately and beautiful city overthrown, his vindictiveness possessed him completely. His thinking became muddled, and he wondered if vindictiveness was not a virtue rather than a vice ; and by vindictiveness he meant, not merely the desire to chastise, but the desire to hurt. The exquisite church and many another noble pile demolished into ruin, and little standing but the bastions of the enceinte !

"No," thought Tony, his jaw thrown forth, "I don't feel as if I were going to be troubled by Scrase's recoil from homicide."

Be it remembered in these saner, happier days that this was Tony's first sight of France.

One by one the men and officers, some of whom had now been two years away from England, were granted their leave. The seniors, and those with the longest service, went first ; and daily the time drew nearer when the Adjutant would summon Tony and offer him a furlough of ten days. In the face of this oncoming moment a strange, unhappy revelation of his weakness was given him. There began a wrestling bout in his mind between his wild longing to go and the accursed thought that ever haunted him like a familiar, and insisted now, and insisted and insisted, that he must not be in a hurry to leave the battalion just when they had arrived into their gravest danger. But oh, as he thought of Honor meeting him at the station ; of the Daubenys' home on Chiswick Mall where she was living with her mother ; of Mrs. Daubeny, and yes, of Mrs. Daubeny's maids ; and about his mother and Peggy in their house

hard by; as he lived through the gay programmes of Berkeley dinners and Strand theatres and Savoy suppers, and the nights in Honor's arms, how he trembled to be there! But here was the strange thing: quickened and throbbing though this hunger was, the *idée fixe* was stronger. No; they should *not* say that O'Grogan, smelling danger, seized every chance to retreat to safer places. Stronger than reason, this rooted fear of being thought afraid! Reason argued that he would be a fool to decline his leave when one after another had taken it and gone cheering—but the opportunity came and he refused it.

"Thanks awfully," he said to the Adjutant, "but I think I'd rather go later."

And as he came away from the Orderly Room he doubted if he had served any purpose by his action; for to no one would he frankly explain, "I'd made up my mind that I wouldn't go till I'd seen some fighting," and odds on they'd think that he had some trouble at home and didn't really want to go. Not *want* to go, *nom de Dieu—de Dieu!* when his heart——

But enough! One was a fool and a slave-mind, and there was an end of it.

Spring of 1917. Summer of 1917. They were interspersed with events as stimulating, as moving, or as numbing as any he had so far known in war, but they came to mean very little to him when they sank behind the terror of the autumn. Roisel, Villers Fauçon, Courcelles, Havrincourt—these were the names that ruled the months before September, 1917; these were the booths where the dramas were acted, but what were their petty scenes of cut-and-thrust after the dark phantasmagoria of Passchendaele had overlaid them? Very small entertainment indeed. Memory scarce troubled to keep their record; it had the sterner stuff of September–October to play with. Here a death and there a death; now a nervous night of digging in No-Man's Land; now a reconnaissance raid with heart thudding, and now the staccato excitement of the foe's avenging sally, for he comes always to return the call, grimly humorous Fritz—at the time these were colossal matters to write to Honor and Peggy about, but after the autumn—how small! All Tony's war in the West was an advance towards Passchendaele's autumn, and a decline from it.

Just a few events cry out to be told.

Spring ; and they were back in reserve in a ruined village. Here they discerned a grievous billeting problem ; no one knew which of the cellars or which of the gutted houses would be the next to "go up." The Germans had hidden their mines everywhere, and these mines, so one was assured, might explode to-day or months hence, for they were worked by some sort of corrosive acid. Most of the intact houses were branded with notice boards : "Dangerous. Walk or ride clear of this building." Aylwin saw a fine barn with a clean, tiled floor and four walls and an untouched roof, and he at once supposed that he had solved the billeting problem, and thanked God that he was not as other men ; but Weymann yelled out, "Don't go in there ! It's too good to be true. We expect it to go up any minute. See that ruined cottage there ? A whole battalion headquarters—Colonel, Major, Adjutant, M.O. and Padre—went up there a few days ago. They are all buried side by side in that cemetery."

Later Tony was informed that the Town Major of this village, a fiery little captain ten years above military age, made a point of billeting the Boche prisoners in this luxurious barn ; and the information distressed him. Was English humour failing at last ? . . . But law ! there must be exceptions to every rule.

His final billet while in reserve was a dug-out cut by the Germans in the bank of a sunken road. Here he lived with the worms and the field rats, under the roots of the hedgerow above. He was very proud of this home and would bring in friends to see the table and chair he had made, and the hat-rack and wash-stand ; but all the while the birds refused to recognize it as the abode of a human being : they would come flying in, singing as they came, and perch on what they took to be the roots of their hedge up above, but was really Tony's hat-rack. He would move forward to touch them, and they flew in panic away, disconcerted to find a human being in an earth that seemed to be the house of Brother Mole.

While they were here, the Sinai dispatches were published. Many of our friends were mentioned in these dispatches : Colonel Tappiter, Hughes Anson, Padre Quickshaw, Scrase. There was no mention of Tony. The Colonel had sent up his name, but Brigade had not forwarded it.

Never mind. The autumn offensive was coming.

Early summer now ; a warm, shining May ; and the men of the 15th are living underground in a fairy-tale wood. The *Bois d'Havrincourt* ! What a dream it is ! The trees, being dense, are straight and tall : ash trees, beeches, silver birches, elms. The undergrowth is a tangle of luxuriant grass, fern, bracken, raspberry-cane and bramble. It is a bluebell wood if ever there was one ; and besides the bluebells there are white hyacinths, lilies of the valley, and a crop of tiny yellow nettle flowers. Men live either in excellent burrows or in wood cabins. When it is fine, they feel like Robin Hood and his Merry Men ; when it is wet, like the Babes in the Wood. A far corner of the forest is held by Brother Hun, and it is strange to look through the trees and to know that he is in the same wood with us, somewhere beyond the thicket. Often he sends his shells screaming over, and *crack* goes a stout tree, split like a twig. And we *gott-strafe* him, too ; and the same cuckoo wakes us both in the morning.

There is a gas alarm in the Bois d'Havrincourt, just before midnight. The strombos horns sound in a long-drawn moan, like the noise that sings in one's head when the ear-drum is disordered. The gas-gongs clang. Tony leaps out of his bed, six feet underground, and wonders where on earth—or under the earth—his gas mask has got to. Finding it, he hangs the box respirator in the "alert position" and scrambles from his burrow. It is dark among the boles, for though the new moon is just above the trees, it is too young to give any light. Against the darkness the alarm-rockets shoot up everywhere, dropping their golden rain among the branches. And everywhere men in goggle-eyed masks are issuing from dug-out and funk-hole and bivouac, and running to one another with news. The wood seems full of hobgoblins holding high revel under the moon. All very beautiful, but can we be dreaming ?

The Gas N.C.O. literally noses round for a smell like chloride-of-lime or one like lilac ; the first will mean chlorine gas and the second phosgene. But he can track no smell at all, and Tony believes him disappointed. Art Webster's voice is heard shouting indignantly, "'Ere, what are they doing about them 'orses and mules ?"

"I dunno," says Joe Wylie. "They were provided once with flannel masks, but the mules 'ave eaten theirs. Guess they're *for* it, pore b——s."

But the wire comes, "Gas Clear," and all unpinch the

pincers from their noses, and wonder if their nostrils will ever open out properly ; and so to earth again, and to bed.

Is there anything more dreamy than a night of labour in No-Man's Land? The working parties parade under the trees at nine o'clock pip emma to go out and dig a new trench between our line and the All Highest's. At three o'clock ac emma they will return—most of them, let us hope. They wax witty as they parade : they compose the letter of sympathy which their officer will write to their old people at home, "He were the best respected lad in his platoon." Christ ! there's a pig of a moon coming from behind a cloud, and it gets brighter every minute. As we reach the duck-board bridge that spans the fire-trench and go clamping over it—"Break step ! Break step ! And shut that talking !"—the moon is abominably brilliant and we see ourselves for once as we imagine others see us : we feel very tall, solid, black shapes moving across the eyes of the Boches. The very barbs of our coiling wire, it seems, must be sharply defined to the All Highest's snipers and machine gunners.

Oh, it's "creepy-crawly" now, as Peggy used to say. Going into St. Austin's church after Father had started the service when we were a family of children, ten thousand years ago, wasn't half so creepy-crawly as this. It wouldn't do for Peggy and Joyce and me to do this thing together, for we never have succeeded in entering any such quiet place without sooner or later making a noise by over-turning something or falling over a hassock, and then giggling. The men make very little noise. They remember that letter, "He were the best respected lad in his platoon" and prefer not to risk its being sent. Praise God that No-Man's Land is a thousand yards wide here and all littered with fallen trees and standing stumps where the enemy, before retreating, laid waste a width of the forest that he might have his field of fire.

When we have got some five hundred yards from our fire-trench and are about five hundred from the Herren, the officers show the men the tape that marks the new trench to be dug, and say, "Get a move on, lads." And do they get a move on? They do. Pick, shovel, and axe go nineteen strokes to the dozen : it is so much serener to be three foot down than on the surface of No-Man's Land. Were they working ten miles behind the line, they would require much more encouragement to get a move on. They would grouse. But in No-Man's

Land they itch for the word to get started. And in three-quarters of an hour they are three foot down and still going strong. Once you are three foot down you can duck when the Boche sweeps No-Man's Land with his searchlight, and lo ? there is not ein Engländer in sight ; the place is as empty as the wilderness of Sinai. His light veers away, and you carry on towards the security of four foot down.

Padre Quickshaw, whose presence in this fatigue is somewhat difficult to explain, is digging with the best. One suspects that he is out here because he wants to show the men that they can be sent to no danger which he will not share ; but, as you value your feelings, don't say this aloud. Not on your life ! It would make him tetchy indeed.

Tony stands above his platoon of diggers, thinking. He thinks : Funny to be standing at midnight exactly between England and Germany. As I look to the right I see the vaunted Hindenburg Line not five hundred yards away, all Verey lights and flashes and sparkle. On my left runs the British Line, much quieter, much less nervy. The former is now the hope and defence of Germany ; the latter is now the threatening outwork of Britain. The vast sea of Germanism comes rolling up and breaking into surf on this long Hindenburg Line here, and the tide of Britain beats grimly over there. It is something to stand on this narrow isthmus between the two and do some thinking. To stand on the half-way line before the two teams kick off and say to oneself, "What a dream !" He stoops down to gather a little sheaf of buttercups to send to Honor and Peggy.

A dangerous place to stand and dream ? Incredibly less dangerous than it sounds ; if your No-Man's Land is a thousand yards wide. Here are three companies working : and not a man has been hit yet. The searchlight surveys the scene again, and the men, if they have not had time to duck, stand perfectly still, though right in its beam—"Keep still ! keep still, damn you !" —and to the German they look like stumps of trees or clumps of brush. The searchlight moves on ; the machine-gun, spitting along its beam, has found no one. And how heavily are the odds weighted against a shell ! Each is likely to kill a few hundred buttercups, but only one in fifty is likely to kill a man.

That first night in No-Man's Land Scrase leads back an unscathed company. Tony and Childe Harold, however, are bringing in a wounded man from Hughes Anson's company. It is just as dawn is greying the world ; the covering parties

have been called in, and the labourers are sneaking off, for their deeds are deeds of darkness and they fear the light. Tony and Childe Harold, walking at the tail-end of the men, as in single file they march crouching home, see a shadowy figure coming slowly towards them from the direction of the German line. They pause, and the company goes on.

"Who goes there? Who's that?" hisses Childe Harold.

There is no answer.

"Who are you?"

The figure replies that he is a man from one of A Company's covering parties.

"Well, why the devil didn't you say so at first?" demands Harold.

"Please sir, I'm hit," answers the man.

Harold apologizes uncomfortably. "Oh, sorry."

They go to him, and find him wounded in the stomach but able to walk. They assist him along, helping him over the fallen trunks and between the stumps. They get him to their own stretcher-bearers who are walking behind the company, and these men, though the day is lightening, stop and apply first field dressings to the wounded man. When his hat is removed he is seen to be such an old boy with hair quite grey. He must be fifty; and a pathetic figure he looks, as he stands, confused by a touch of shell-shock, in No-Man's Land, which should be a Young Man's Land. Childe Harold is gentle with him: obviously the boy is sorry to have spoken roughly; sorry that he was trapped into scolding an old man thirty years his senior, who has been hit and is in pain.

Next time the machine-guns get them better. C Company loses six men wounded and one killed. The one killed is a boy that has been named here more than once, Dicky Roberts, the young brother of Fred. They bring his body to an Aid Post in the wood and lay it under a tree, covering face and form with a blanket. Tony sends for Fred; and Fred comes through the trees, ignorant of the calamity; but he meets Jim Stott and asks him, maybe suspecting something: "How's young Dicky? I was just coming to find him."

"You'll have a job to find him now, Freddy," Jim answers.

"Why, what do you mean? He ain't killed, is he?"

"Aye," says Jim.

Unable to say more, but anxious to sympathize, Jim falls in by his side and silently accompanies him to the Aid Post.

Tony leads them to the place where the dead boy lies under his blanket. Fred kneels down by his brother's head and lifts the blanket from the waxen, blood-stained face. Then he breathes out something between a sigh and a groan and covers his eyes with his hand and remains thus for a few minutes. Not till he has removed his hand does Jim Stott try again to offer a word of sympathy. He says :

"That's him reet enough, Freddy."

And Fred without taking his eyes from his brother's face answers :

"Yes."

"Aye, Freddy : it's him."

Nothing more is said. The sympathy of a good, inarticulate man has been offered and accepted.

To-morrow the machine-guns are more urgent than ever. Either they are suspicious that something is afoot in the darkness of No-Man's Land, or they know everything and, having tasted the blood of the 15th, are lusting for more. We can hardly move to-night, for the searchlight traps us every minute. We seem always to be standing, motionless and breathless as statues, till it shall have turned its staring eye from our dark, petrified shapes. The searchlight is an aiming eye, and a machine-gun spits along its stare. Men fall ; officers mutter oaths. An officer is hit somewhere, and, much faster than word of a mere private's fall, comes the news from man to man.

"Mr. Moulden's wounded, sir."

"God !"

"No, stay where you are, Tono." It is Scrase speaking. "I'll go. Look after these men——" and Kit disappears into the darkness ; for Kit doesn't seem to know physical fear.

What is this ? Tony is hating himself because his first response to the news of Moulden's wounding is an acute disappointment : now Moulden will leave the regiment for hospital and perhaps return no more ; he won't be there to see the vindication of O'Grogan. There is no compassion for Moulden in this first reaction : only a compassion for himself ; and something of jealousy too : this man, over whom he had planned to triumph, is winning honour and sympathy because he is the first officer to be hit.

"Is it serious?"

"No, sir. A wound in the thigh, it seems. They're getting 'im away all right."

Oh, good. Then perhaps he will come back to the battalion. He must. He *must* be there to see Tony's triumph. That triumph will be deflated of half its joy if Moulden isn't there to witness it.

Queer! His relief at hearing that the wound is not serious is as great as that sudden despair just now.

What more the substance of dream or fairy-tale than an enormous white château that stood among the trees behind the Boche line, a conspicuous object for miles around, suddenly disappearing in a cloud like the palace of Aladdin? That's just the sort of nonsense-thing that we expect to happen in this moonshine wood, and did happen the other day. Havrincourt Château stood white and stable behind the Boche line at nine minutes past seven one morning. There was a "bang" that shook the bole of every tree and drove the birds fluttering and screaming into the sky, and lifted a thousand English faces above their parapet; and at ten minutes past seven the wood was still there, behind your Boche, but no château—only a cloud of smoke shaping itself and going down the wind. Men said in retrospect that we had long been tunnelling a sap beneath it and now at last had mined it sky-high; others that the enemy was using its cellars as an ammunition dump, and a lucky shot from our artillery in one moment discovered this interesting fact and gave it its term; but we do not really know. All we know is that it happened before our eyes—and that one day, hundreds of years hence, when this weary war is over, we shall wake up and wonder if it was true.

Or look at this village of Ytres, where we are back in reserve. Is it less of a mix-up than the wildest cucumber dream? Here's a French village with devil a Frenchman in it, and never a house that is not trying to stand on its head; a brick village that a children's party might have built on the garden lawns and knocked over in a temper. Here's abundant evidence of women and children—torn garments, broken toys, rusty cots and cradles—and all the women and children seem to have trooped away at the heels of some Pied Piper, and the flowers

have entered into possession, as they might do in a fairy-tale of Grimm. The village is a mixture of ruins and flowers and English soldiers. You never saw such disorder and insubordination among flowers and weeds and grasses. All the cultured and genteel flowers, like children freed from restraint, are running riot with the common vulgar flowers. Jack's as good as his master, and the bluebell is hobnobbing with the iris; the wild rose is all cock-a-hoop, consorting as an equal with your peonies and garden roses; the wild poppies, red and pink, are pot-companions with the last of the tulips; and Columbine, the dancing girl, sits in the same lofty places as Mistress Dorothy Perkins. The grasses, meadow-sweets and all their impolite society are very high and mighty; and Daisy, the field wench, is damned if she'll curtsy to anyone. Discipline is gone with rejoicings, and there's a first-class Russian Revolution in the garden.

And the soldiers who wander and bivouac in the ruins have gone utterly "magnoon." Joe Wylie has formed a "Magnoon Band," where they all sit round in a semicircle, in the dust of a broken courtyard; and Joe, with a German helmet on his head, conducts them. An old perforated tin pail between the knees of Art Webster is the kettle-drum; a cracked hog'shead beaten at intervals by the same artist is the big drum; two rusty saucepan lids are the 'cymbals; an old stack-pipe is the trombone; and any old iron the triangle. And Joe Wylie is not above giving them a lift with his mouth-organ, even as he conducts them in "Yakka-hooley-hickey-doolah." He stands on a rusted tin strong-box; in front of him is an old music-stand (the discovery of which was the *fons et origo* of the band); the music is some yellowed French magazine; and religiously he turns over its pages as the symphony proceeds. "Casey Jones—Got another Daddy—Got another Daddy on the Cunard Line." Of course he out-Sousa's Sousa, till his helmet falls off his head and the band can't go on for laughing; nor he.

One day a few sad Frenchmen in black frock-coats and strange black hats come into this recently evacuated village and stroll among the ruins, saying, "It was here that I lived. *Diable*, here is one of my exercise books that I used when I was at the school. *Le pauvre Marcel*, he planted that rose tree, *et mon Hélène en était si fier*. . . . *Eh bien, que voulez vous; allons, venez, mes amis*, it is useless to stay here staring; but devil take it, I think my currants do not do well this year."

They saunter towards the noise of the Regimental Magnoon Band as it plays in the sunlight that washes the cobbles of the estaminet's courtyard. They stare; and do not understand. The band is rendering a very sad air *con expressione*—with excessive *expressione* indeed; and the frock-coated Frenchmen, after watching, move away. “*Ab, ces Anglais ! . . . La Guerre, n'est-ce donc pas sérieux ?* Is it not a matter of life and death for La Belle France, and for their England too? *Et ils la traitent toujours à la blague*; and their idea of joking is so bizarre; it is not gay. They fight well, certainly, but without the dignity of a great passion. As for patriotism, they seem not to understand what it means; they seem always to speak of their country more with bitterness than with love. *Mon Dieu !*”

The band gives of its best to the Frenchmen, anxious to please; it gives them “Fred Karno's Army”:

“We are Fred Karno's Army,
What bloody use are we?
We cannot fight, we cannot sing,
We cannot do P.T.
And when we get to Berlin
The Kaiser he will say,
Hoch, hoch, mein Gott,
What a bloody fine lot
Are the British Infantee !”

And officers looking on! *Mon Dieu !*

Such was the comment of France on England. Here is England's comment on her great ally, voiced by as good a nuncio of hers as you will find: Art Webster. Tony at this time is sent on a message to that part of the front where the English Right is in touch with the French Left; and he takes Moulden's old batman, Webster, who is temporarily acting for him. In this sector there is a vast cemetery, one half of which is given to the English and the other to the French, and a pathway separates the two. The difference between the two halves is the difference between the two nations. The French crosses are beautifully cut; they have gabled roofs to protect them from the weather, and their inscriptions speak with love of the soldiers beneath and always contain the words ‘*Mort Glorieusement.*’ The English crosses are as simple as the first on Calvary; one bar of wood crossing another; and their inscriptions, unless they are

unofficial, seldom contain anything but the number, name and regiment of the dead man, and, forsooth, his religion, "C. of E.," "R.C.," "Wes.," as if that still mattered to him. Never is one seen that makes mention of glory. Tony and Art Webster are walking up the pathway, for there is to be a stirring ceremony among the French graves to-day. An eloquent *député* is coming to address the soldiers of the *armée*, as they parade beside their fallen brothers. Such things happen in the French sectors, for have not they among the nations best understood *moral*; nay, invented it? The *député* comes in his frock-coat, and a magnificent general in sky-blue and gold accompanies him; the French troops are drawn up in front of the orator, and the thousand French crosses seem arrayed at attention too; he draws from his breast-pocket the manuscript of his oration; he delivers it with immense verve and faultless elocution, his spare hand constantly pointing to the paraded dead. His excitement increases, his eyes fill with tears, his hand waves more furiously; the soldiers, listening, call out endorsements and deep bravoës, while their eyes moisten. Tony and the single English tommy standing at his side begin to feel uncomfortable. The orator works up to his peroration; he reaches it with a fine crescendo; he has done; he thrusts the manuscript back into his breast, and embraces the general, placing a kiss on both his cheeks. Tony hears one comment from Art Webster: "Oh my Gawd!"

The performances of Hughes Anson are not irrelevant here. The Roseate Hughes had not long savoured the atmosphere of the trenches so like to Gallipoli before he fell again into his old bad habits, and after killing the bottles of whisky at night and making merry with his friends, would aver that the evening could only be fittingly closed by a visit with a bomb in each hand to the trenches of Brother Boche. "Yes, better have a dekko at his trenches," he would say. "We don't know what games he may be up to. Better go and see. Who's coming! You, George? Come along; it's a good war."

His friends declining to partner him, he would sally forth into No-Man's Land alone, stagger in a somewhat zigzag route across its wide desolation, throw his bombs over the German wire, and return to his own parapet, singing a merry snatch the while. To Tony's alarm, he loomed up one night, on his return from such an unauthorized visit, in front of Tony's traverse; and very red, shining and happy he looked, though

unsteady, as he loudly chanted: "*Where* did that one go to, 'Erbert? *Where* did that one go? . . . Where the—how the—who the—what the—*where* did that one go? . . . Hallo, Bungay! It's a good war."

The men laughed at him, and admired: but Authority got word of it, and cautioned him. A bottle of whisky some nights later drowned this caution, and all other forms of caution too; and Rosy was out again in No-Man's Land, getting on with the war. Who may have testified against him will never be known now, but next morning Rosy found himself under arrest, for attacking the enemy without orders, for unnecessarily endangering the life of an officer, for risking the capture of his person and valuable information therewith, and for dear knows what else.

He spent the succeeding days in a hut, without his belt and under the charge of a delighted Childe Harold, who reported to the brotherhood of C Company that Rosy spent all day with the Manual of Military Law on the table before him and a damp towel round his head, studying, studying, studying, and anon pacing up and down as he conned large sections of it by heart, and then inviting the Childe to hear him his lesson. Rosy had been a lawyer, we remember, before he went in for the jollier business of Advertising, and then for the still jollier business of War, and he had little doubt that he would be a match for the red and gilded old Colonel and the junior officers who would sit on his body in judgment.

"I've got 'em! Harry my Childe!" he would say to his jailer, after spouting verbatim a section of the Army Act. "I've got 'em *there*!" and he turned down a spatulate thumb to signify the position of the Colonel and his subordinates. "*That'll* see 'em right in the soup. 'Struth! it's fun. Damme, Harold, I'm looking forward to this. Allah is just."

In due time he was up before his Court-Martial, and it was "But how, sir, does your contention stand in the face of Chapter Six, Paragraphs Fifty-eight to Seventy-one, Pages Seventy-one to Seventy-three of the Manual of Military Law?" and "But if you will excuse me, sir, it says in R.P. One hundred and eight, M.M.L., and in the corresponding section of the Army Act; and again, I think you will find, in M.M.L., Chapter Seven, Paragraphs Thirty to Forty," and he was reciting a long

passage to a bench of troubled and bewildered men. If they disallowed this recitation, he had another in pickle for them, equally long and unintelligible at first hearing, whereby they were totally disabled for a while ; and, in short, he was acquitted by some good honest men who fully believed that the British Courts-Martial were the fairest in the world, and that, if there were any doubt about the prisoner's guilt (as no one was prepared, in this case and by this time, to deny) he must be given the benefit of it.

He left the court as rosily smiling as when he reappeared from his solitary raids ; and he received the felicitations of his brother officers, including Colonel Tappiter, whose words were : " You've got off this time, Anson, and I accordingly congratulate you, but let me assure you there'll be a conviction next time, Manual of Military Law or no Manual of Military Law. I'll see to it myself. It's quite possible for me to pull all sorts of strings behind the scenes. I hope you clearly understand that."

" Perfectly, sir ; thank you," said Rosy ; and soon after that there was no need for him to attack the enemy without orders. The orders came.

Tony to Honor, at the close of a letter :

" We are in process of moving from one sector of the front to another, and I am writing this in the ruins of a famous little village that figured largely in recent battles. This time three years ago it must have been perfectly lovely. Although it is laid now in brick-dust, it is still beautiful for its wild, overgrown flower-gardens. Looking out of the door of the shanty in which I am sitting, I can see growing among the weeds and grasses and beneath the ruined walls bluebells, prim-roses, forget-me-nots, buttercups, dandelions, purple and yellow pansies, foxgloves and hundreds of other flowers whose names I don't know. Recumbent among the weeds are the fruit trees deliberately cut down by the Hun, and they are blossoming for the last time by reason of the sap that is in them. At mess last night we had in the centre of the table a broken jar chock-full of pansies. Where are your letters ? Remember you cannot write too often nor too long. When I find myself on the last page of your letters I feel unhappy to think I am coming to their end. I slow up to make them last longer. And after I have turned in sometimes and am beneath my blankets, I read them through again before going to sleep so as to have pleasant dreams.

"But enough of this nonsense. Herewith three absurd little buttercups which really did in their lifetime have all Germany arrayed on one side of them and all Britain on the other.

"Well, well. I've reached the bottom of page ten, so it's time to ring off. Chin chin. . . . Oh, just a minute, I forgot something. Much love. Thank you, that's all. Ring off. Yours always—always."

CHAPTER III

TOWARDS THE BATTLE

THEIR movement from the sunny places of the southern front towards the north was neither direct nor speedy. With the rest of the Division they were first concentrated in some of the back parlours behind Britain's big shop-window frontage from St. Quentin to the sea; and here they were refurbished, reinforced and reconditioned. Then they were moved to store-rooms further north and put to drill and practices as simple as those of their first training in England. They learned again to form fours; they charged again with fixed bayonets at dummy enemies swinging from gallows; they practised shooting at the butts; they practised the capture of trenches in a field of daisies. And all the time they were given good food, good games, good concert parties, and good leave. Thus they were refreshed and fattened up for slaughter.

They heard the Bayonet Lecturer.

Yes, in these days, the voice of the Bayonet Lecturer was loud in the land. The appearance of the famous Bayonet Lecturer, in the second half of the great war, was a most significant development. Tony could not determine whether this horrid portent did more to ratify or to undermine his belief in the sterling humour of common England. High Authority, it seemed, had decided by this time that the war against a scientifically dour and scientifically remorseless foe could not be won by an army which, while willing to fight as gallantly as most, declined to hate; it made the remarkable discovery that organized hate could only be beaten by organized hate; that frightfulness, though it might be disconcerted by a barrage of laughter, could not be drowned and overridden by it, but must be answered by a like frightfulness; and over this interesting discovery (to Tony's thinking) they fairly went

'magnoon." They ordained that frightfulness must be inculcated in the Lancashire mill hands, the Glasgow stevedores, the London costers, the English Public Schoolboys and other sportsmen who made up the British Army. Only it must not be called "frightfulness" when postulated of the British, but "The Offensive Spirit." So these gentlemen, the Bayonet Lecturers—gifted orators all and selected for their platform virtuosity—were sent from unit to unit to deliver the goods; to preach, that is, the new Gospel of the Offensive Spirit. And deliver the goods they did; whether the goods were taken indoors or left on the sill is another matter.

The most celebrated of them, who shall be nameless here, was described as "worth another army corps" by a High General who was even more gurglingly elated than most with the new gospel; and he was certainly a remarkable performer on the boards; the 15th were lucky to get him for their visitation.

The question for Tony was: did the sending out of these Apostles provide one more assurance that England's humour was collapsing beneath the storm, or was it perhaps the greatest tribute that had yet been paid to the unconquerable good nature of her army as a whole? If this organized and rather desperate attempt to change the nature of the army from St. Quentin to the sea was deemed necessary, what better proof could you have of the strength and the universality of that nature? Splendid! He plumped for this latter reading, and the thought gave him much glee. He decided that, although the humour of the English was wilting a little under the hurricane—here a branch and there a branch (especially some of the topmost branches)—in root and trunk it stood stolid and unshakable as ever. And it would endure; nay, more, it would be a winning factor, *pace* my masters, the Staff. Why? Because from frightfulness and passion the pendulum could swing only to despair and possibly mutiny; whereas from a grim, grumbling, grinning endurance it would swing to—a grim, grumbling, grinning endurance. As he had always foreseen, the best-natured army would win.

So it was with more glee than disgust that he went with the rest of the battalion to sit at the feet of the Chief of the Apostles. Literally they sat at his feet. They were all massed into a large barn and given the order "Sit!" and, as there were no benches, they sank tailorwise to the floor, facing a stage erected

by a concert party, the illustrious "Th'Lads" of the 42nd (East Lancashire) Division. On to these boards stepped Demosthenes (Acting Major) to deliver his Philippic. His very first words showed that his entertainment was going to be as rich as any given by "Th'Lads," splendid though these Lancashire comedians were. If ever there was a master of crowd psychology who knew what was the sure "stage laugh," it was the Major now standing or dancing before them.

Listen :

"When you are rushing towards the Boche with your bayonets, boys, and he throws up his hands and says, 'Kamerad ! Kamerad ! I'm the father of five children,' kill him ; *kill* him, or he may be the father of five more." (Loud laughter.) "Yes, you take it from me, lads, there's only one good Boche—oh yes, there's *one* good Boche, there's *one*—just *one*—and that's a dead Boche." (Loud laughter.) "You see, it's no good feeling meek and Christian when you've got the bayonet in your hands and are going to stick it into the gizzard of a Hun, which unfortunately (as I grant you, I grant you) is not at all a Sunday school performance. You're going to draw blood, and you've got to feel blood-thirsty about it. Now, I've no particular use for swearing, but I think there's a case for it when you're advancing to the attack ; it gets you into the real offensive spirit. It is no good running across No-Man's Land behind your bayonet and mumbling 'God forgive me' or 'For what we are about to receive may the Lord make us truly thankful.'" (Loud laughter.) "No, boys, grip your rifle, *so*—as if you meant it—set your teeth, *so*, and charge across No-Man's Land, hissing through them"—and he acted the part, running the breadth of the stage, his hand gripping an imaginary rifle, and his lips moving over clenched teeth in unheard oaths. Luckily the favourite oaths of the British soldier mostly began with labial consonants and so could be at once recognized by lip-readers ; and the Royal West Essex roared as it recognized its old friends. Heard melodies are sweet, but those unheard are sweeter ; therefore, ye soft pipes, play on. The Major charged back and forth across the stage, saying nothing and saying everything. Gad, it was rich. Tony heard Scrase gulp.

Flushed with his success, he pursued : "I was once demonstrating this to a meek little bespectacled man, who was probably a Sunday school teacher at home ; indeed, I think that in

civilian life he was 'Queenie' of *Home Notes*—(Loud laughter from the tommies, who did not read *Punch*)—"and when I had finished, I asked him to do it for me himself—and this is how he did it"—and the Major gave an impersonation of a timid, peering little man, not too sound at his knees, stumbling among the shell-holes, with bayonet fixed and lips muttering in a gentle but determined "B—— h—— ! B—— h—— ! B—— h—— ! " It brought down the house.

"Not that I'm scoffing——" began the Major, but he couldn't proceed, for the applause broke out again. He smiled his acknowledgment.

"Not that I'm scoffing at religion," he continued, when the noise had subsided. "I want to say here and now that I'm on the side of the padres in this war, every time. I don't see how you can get through this hell-upon-earth without some sort of religion, and perhaps I may be permitted to tell you that I go to my Holy Communion every Sunday morning——"

Tony turned towards Scrase to see how he would take this, and he saw Kit's eyebrows lift. He looked round upon the men, but he saw no repulsion there; the men were lost in admiration of the orator's powers. He understood. The least introspective soldiers in the world, they knew nothing of their own natures, nor suspected that the oration was a crime against themselves, knifing their noblest quality; the crudest of critics, they did not doubt that the religious peroration on which the Major had now embarked was very fine indeed.

"When this odious task is done," he concluded, "and done manfully, I feel that we shall see again the finger of God pointing to the Manger at Bethlehem."

And he turned about, signifying that he had finished.

They gave him an ovation that shook the walls and the roof; and when he could be heard again, he replied: "I don't want you to applaud me, boys. The only thanks I want is the assurance that when next you have to go over the top, you will prove 'shock troops' in every sense of the word. Remember, if you have to attack, well, by God, *attack*; and for your purposes then, my text is the truth: 'The only good Boche is a dead Boche.' Good-bye and God bless you."

As the men filed out Tony kept near his own C Company officers to hear their comments. Scrase's was simple.

"Oh my God!" he said.

"Another powerful article by Mr. Bottomley next week," said Aylwin.

"Yes," agreed Tony. "I feel I shall report sick to-night."

"Oh no; 'medicine and duty' as usual," sighed Scrase.

"Well, I think it was a damn fine effort," Childe Harold asserted. "I haven't laughed so much for ages."

And all that evening C Company was in debate.

"I think we'd better resign," suggested Scrase, who was sufficiently distressed to reveal some of his true thoughts. "It's not the fact that one fire-eating Major poured out a lot of blood and iron that worries me: one can hear the same sort of thing any day in any club in Pall Mall—only less well done; and the Alderman, my father, is no bad hand at it"—Kit often spoke with playful affection of "The Alderman my father"—"but it's the fact that the men applauded."

"Well, I think it was damn fine," said the Childe.

"I suppose you could argue," Aylwin suggested, "that the war's got to be won, and, if that can only be done by us all becoming Huns for a year or two, well, let's get on with it."

"*Pre*-cisely," said the Childe. "Sound sense."

"Oh, you bloody little fool!" snapped the irritated Scrase. "Can't you see that if you defeat the material forces of the Hun and at the same time let his spiritual ideas triumph, you're really beaten?"

"Maybe, but I consider it was a damn fine speech," said the Childe.

For a short period they were in the Line again, having taken over from a regular Division which was going north to the Salient. When themselves should be relieved, it would be their turn to move by easy stages to the north. Again it was a quiet sector, its rate of mortality a death a day.

The chief activity was in the air. The kite balloons hung aloft at regular intervals behind the British front, and a similar chain of German balloons dotted the clear sky over the enemy country. In front of both these arrays aeroplanes patrolled to guard them from the waspish assassins from over the way. Because it was the local game, in these parts, for a midge-like aeroplane to come suddenly—swiftly—out of the blue and bear down upon an enemy balloon, as it hung there

captive and helpless; to set fire to it, and race home again. And besides these visitors—sudden, swift, and nervy—there were the cold-blooded groups of photographing and observing aeroplanes, often eight or nine in number, which sailed with damnable calmness over the hostile territory, and took their notes, and, turning about in an elegant manœuvre, plied back to their aerodromes, no more excitedly. Then the late summer sky would be spotted with the white puffs of British shrapnel or the black puffs of German high-explosive. One day a German machine was successfully forced down within the British lines. Its pilot descended gracefully; got out; set fire to his machine; lit up a cigarette and waited for an escort to take him prisoner.

Another evening—it was about six o'clock—his brother came out of the blue and, humming over the 15th trenches, made for the nearest balloon at a speed so tearing, and in a loneliness so splendid and pitiable, that the men of Essex below him could but wish him every success. In defiance of a well-known order, six hundred heads swung back to watch him; and had he cared to look down he might have seen the whole British line illuminated for him with white faces—two of which, in a trench bay, were the faces of Corporal J. Stott and Fred Roberts.

But he was in a great haste up there, and probably his eyes were busied with events on his own level, rather than with those on the world beneath. For every aircraft gun which could reach his field of heaven was playing about him now. Innumerable white flakes of shrapnel danced in pairs before him; black flakes of H.E. joined their company and gambolled on their own like friendless black sheep in a flock; and soon a whole scarf of sky was as spotted as the skin of a leopard. With trick after trick, feint after feint, he tried to get through this curtain of fire: he dipped, but the curtain fell before him; he beat up higher, and the curtain followed him there.

Now whether it was the natural instinct of Fred Roberts and his kind for grumbling against their own side, or whether it was their detached interest, as sportsmen, in the pluck of another sportsman who was fighting against odds—which ever it may have been, and one inclines to the latter explanation—they seemed often to forget that the aeroplane was German, and the shrapnel puffs British—aye, and the silly sausage-

balloons British too—and they would give the best part of their applause to the lonely little midge of an aviator, so daringly singeing the eyebrows of his foes.

“Gaw! ’e’s got some pluck, ain’t ’e?” said Fred Roberts. “*Thet’s* the spirit! ’E’ll do ’em! ’E’ll do ’em in—you mark me words.”

“’Appen he’ll be hit first,” suggested Jim Stott, more from a desire to provoke Roberts than from any ill will to the aeroplane.

“’*It* ’im? ’*It* ’im?” scoffed Fred. “Them archies never ’it anyone yet. Remember old Fritz in Sinai? Never got within a mile of ’im, they never. Their shootin’s no ruddy good. Never ’as bin.”

“Ah’ve seed better,” Jim admitted.

“Yur—it was a walk-over for ’im.”

“Bah goom! he’s through!” shouted Corporal Stott. “Aye, he is—he is and all. Goom, he’s a champion lad.”

“I told yer so!” shouted Fred, delighted. “Blimey, he’s done ’em in properly.”

“Noah, but he ain’t, Fred. He’s turned about.”

He had: there was no doubt of it; so Fred took comfort in the words:

“Ah, but he’ll do ’em in yet. You see!”

The aeroplane was now flying parallel with the shrapnel curtain, as if seeking a hole in it.

“Ah reckon he’s looking for his chance. He woan’t give in, in a hurry.”

“*Course* not!” Fred instantly agreed.

“Ah must say Ah hope they doan’t get him.”

“*They’ll* never get him. Not on your life!”

That moment the aviator executed a marvellous feint: he pitched nose-first, as though hit, and shot towards the earth, spinning as he fell, but just as all were shouting that he was done for, he righted, hared *under* the curtain, and in a few seconds was behind it, racing for the balloon. Gorgeous! How could the ranks of Tuscany forbear to cheer? Their eyes swung towards the threatened balloon, which up till now (so it seemed) had sat stupidly on the top of its cable watching these events so personal to itself. It was rapidly descending.

“Crums!” Fred Roberts pointed to it and laughed almost gloatingly. “’*E’s* got the wind up—good and proper. ’*E’s* for ’ome all right.”

A tiny little yellow umbrella with a dangling tassel opened to leeward of the balloon; and another; it was the observers who had leapt out in their parachutes, and were floating to earth, swayed to and fro by the wind.

"Here they coom!" cried Jim Stott. "Here they coom! Non-stop to t'ground! See 'em, choom?"

A whole trench system was laughing its amusement at their discomfiture.

"Eh, but yon lads weren't havin' any. It's their dinner time, tha knows. . . ." Jim watched them happily, and then laughed still more at the humour of their alarm. "They're main short o' breath just now, Ah reckon."

The aeroplane abandoned this balloon, which seemed to have escaped it, and turned towards its neighbour; but by now the shrapnel curtain was in front of it again; and of a truth it seemed to the watchers below that the aeroplane, tired of this opposition, deliberately fought a way through the bursting shells, winding in and out among them—like a Rugby three-quarters with the ball in his hands, worming, feinting and dodging through the opposing forwards and backs. An inspiring sight; and Fred Roberts and Jim Stott shouted their encouragement.

"Thet's the style! Go it, chum!"

"Shoov 'em off, lad! Give 'em summat to think aboot. Eh, there's a try coomin' for Owdham now!"

"They're pullin' the other balloon dahn, see? Bet the observer's sweatin' 'is guts out."

"Aye, t'ooother sausage has got t'belly-ache now. See, lad? t'ooother's coomin' down."

"Yah! They ain't 'arf windy, are they? 'Ere are the perra-shoots. Two more for 'ome!"

The aeroplane was through again, and, like a released bird, it flew at a hundred miles an hour towards the nearest stationary balloon. But this was only a feint to suggest a false security to the one on which its eye was really cocked; it sharply banked and curved round, and, increasing its speed, swooped down upon the real prey. The observer—there was only one—in this second balloon stayed almost too long. The deadly aeroplane appeared to be above him before the watchers saw that his parachute was clear of the basket and sinking through the air. Now an edge of orange flame outlined the top of the balloon and burst into a column of flame, which quickly

shrouded itself in a cloud of smoke ; and the burning gas-bag began to drop like a stone. All held their breath as they thought the falling conflagration must envelop the tiny yellow parachute with its hanging atom of humanity, and frizzle it to nothing. But—ah, thank God !—it fell to the side of it, and in a second all that was left of the battle was a tenuous black cloud in the sky with a long smoking line reaching down to the earth ; a tiny yellow umbrella swinging and swaying in the wind ; and an enemy aeroplane diminishing, fast as thought, into the distant sky.

“ ‘E’s going back for his Iron Cross,” said Fred Roberts.

“ And Ah reckon he deserves it too,” said Jim Stott.

“ ‘E ain’t waitin’ to stay for supper, is he ? ”

“ Noah, but Ah reckon he’ll be havin’ a sup o’ summat good to his dinner to-neet.”

“ A rare plucky feller, that.”

“ Aye, and did tha see as how he never fired at t’lads in t’parachutes ? ”

“ Nah ; proper sportsman, ‘e is.”

CHAPTER IV

A GLIMPSE OF HONOR

THEY were back in rest for a few days ; their billets most comfortable—a flock of Armstrong and Nissen huts in a meadow. Passing the Orderly Room Hut one evening, Tony saw a rolled valise and a stuffed kit-bag resting on the ground outside, with a soiled trench-coat tossed astride them. Near-by stood Art Webster biting at one of his fingers. Some new arrival, undoubtedly ; and Tony, not incurious, sent a sidelong glance into the darkness of the Orderly Room. He halted. He had seen the back of an officer who was reporting to the Adjutant there, and thought he recognized it. A quick glance at the names painted on valise and kit-bag—and he read “Lieut. A. Moulden, 1/15 R.W.E.”

“Yuss. Mr. Moulden’s back, sir,” said Art Webster.

Tony’s heart leapt with satisfaction.

Leave was freely granted in these last weeks before the north claimed them ; and they called it their “good-bye leave.” Tony did not doubt nor linger this time ; he would take his look at Honor and all whom he loved, and give them a kiss, in case—but he hardly formulated the rest of the thought. True, some of the officers and men who had been on leave said, “Don’t go. Let it alone. Don’t touch it ;” and when asked what they meant, declared that the contrast was too awful—the contrast between the restless, crowded but lonely life of the front and the lazy, loving, lionizing atmosphere of a Ten-days’ Leave. No, it was too unsettling.

Art Webster, on his return from Thamesmouth, expressed this in his own way to Tony : “If you was to give me ten pounds, sir, I wouldn’t go on leave again. The leave’s all right, but it’s the coming back. My missus ’ung around me neck—sort of hysterical—and begged me to go sick or git wounded

or git discharged with ignominy—anything so that I went back and stayed at home. 'Tain't good enough, sir."

And another time Tony met Hughes Anson as he arrived back.

Hughes pitched down his valise in front of his hut, and tossed his pack after it, and said nothing.

"Well, how goes it, Rosy?" asked Tony.

"Rotten," was all that Hughes said, nor had he humour enough to make a grimace.

"I suppose it *is* rather beastly coming back," Tony sympathized. "But they all say it's not so bad once you've got back and are in the old rut again. After a week you feel quite in the swim again."

"That may be," said Hughes. "But I'm still coming back."

Tony went of course. They put his warrant into his hand; and he was off to the Railhead, with a pack on his back and a palpitation in his heart. The leave train was no mere joggling chain of coaches with half their windows broken: it was a stretch of time bespangled by an enchanter's beam; the leave-boat was an interval in time, a thrilled suspense, separating one tract from another, like the break in the land where the grey September Channel rolled between the heights of Boulogne and the Folkestone cliffs. And then Folkestone itself, and the green downs, and the London train lying asleep along the quay—the London train! was it possible?—You bowed old porters with your kindly, comic faces, well met, well met indeed; we know your meaning now, for your brothers and your children over there have taught it us. A bustling on the jetty, but without haste or excitement—not the bustle of the Boulogne quays—and at last the train moved, and either window looked out on England—England so quiet and so green-hilled, her blue mists hanging in the thickets like wood-fire smoke, and her oaks and beeches and elms all dressing themselves for autumn, in her own slow, hasteless way. Was ever a country of pattern so miniature and with trees so many and varied? Here she lay, behind her long wall building at Passchendaele, whose khaki was a brown from her own meadows, and in its vagueness and its quietness so like to her! O little land—but no more, no more! let this subaltern's tears pass unrecorded; it is a story that was told not once nor twice, in those old and faded days.

And England soon passed from his gaze, for Honor had the whole of his mind. No groom, as his wedding-day drew

towards evening, trembled with desire of his bride as Tony now for the girl who was his wife. How could he ever have doubted his love when he could return like this to her? No other woman in the world did he want. Jill? He had wondered once if Jill could have given him more than Honor, but somehow this afternoon he wasn't loving Jill as he was loving Honor; not in the same way. Honor was drawing him as if she was the only lodestone anywhere; and it was less her youth and beauty which gave her this power than the fact that she was *his*. His wife, and belonging to him! He was supremely happy as the train bore him to Honor. No shadowy fear, coming out of the future from its seat at Passchendaele, could find standing-room in his heart: as a man in the grip of a passion stays not to reck of consequences, so Tony this evening could see nothing, and cared to see nothing, beyond the welcoming arms of Honor.

Victoria Station; and there she was, a-tiptoe behind the waiting crowd.

He held her by the shoulders away from him, for it was his humour to study her and learn her looks afresh; and she gazed up at him, smiling at this humour, and deprecating it, and happy beneath it. He pressed those wide little shoulders between his fingers that he might know them again and possess them; for had he not, years ago, begun by falling in love with her shoulders? Six years ago, and did she look older? Hardly a day: what a child she seemed! And she had taken great pains with herself to-day: those marcel-waves in her hair were put there for *him*, and that powder giving a peach-bloom to her skin, and that touch of rose—done in secret and ashamedly, no doubt—on her round cheeks.

In the taxi which bore them through the unlighted streets, they held each other's hands or suddenly hugged each other again, like a vulgar couple; not speaking much, because all their talk seemed perfunctory and unreal. At the Daubenys' home there was a mighty to-do of welcome, Mrs. Daubeny and his mother and Joyce, with little Antony Leonard much grown, and Peggy with little Michael Derek also unrecognizable, and the two maids, all performing in the drawing-room; but it escaped him somehow; he could not appreciate it or realize it, for Honor and his thoughts of her got in the way; he and she must reach the climax of their reunion, and melt into one another, before anything else could become real. And that

night, when darkness shut out all the world, and nothing lived for them, nor was—neither the familiar furniture in the room nor the large guns belching fire towards Passchendaele—and when they indeed seemed to melt into one another, and he, with his lips on her disordered hair, said: “You are the only thing that matters to me; nothing, nothing else matters,” then Tony knew a supreme moment of his life, and a thought flashed: “If ever I am tempted to doubt my love again, I shall remember this, and what is possible between her and me;” and another: “I have known the best of life; if I have to die, I shall think of this as I go, and will not rebel.”

Of course this perfection did not last; it can only live when the world is shut out. Three days, four days, and he got used to being on leave and walking the London pavements and living as a married man with a sprightly wife at his side; and there were times when he would be impatient with her. Her mind was so impervious to his new ideas; it was the mind of the excellent Major-General her father: she would just frown over them and be confused. Here they were, late in 1917, and she was still hating the Germans—even hating them more volubly than in the first days of August, 1914. Her hardness towards the enemy repelled him with a deeper wound than any the enemy were likely to give him; for it was a wound of the heart. When he irritably protested, “In the trenches we abandoned all that bunk after the first month or two,” she got quite flushed and angry and said, “Well, why go on with it; why not come home and be a conchy?” and he could not attempt to explain why, because he knew it was not in her to understand. Instead he exasperated her further by suggesting that the conscientious objectors must be heroic fellows; at which her brow knit with petulance, till laughter unstrung it, and she said, “You’re just trying to make me angry, and I’ve determined not to be rude to you once during your leave, so it simply can’t be done, darling.”

Her manifest inability to feel the war in all its magnitude appalled him too. She thought she felt it, and loudly, even merrily, protested that she did; but she didn’t really. He had imagined that the world had but one centre now, to which all eyes looked—the war; but Honor was still moving in her own

little world of which herself was the centre ; the war shadowed it, but did no more.

And another thing hurt him : wonderful as had been her abandonment to him on the night of his home-coming, she had really but little understanding of the part she might play towards a husband who had come back to her with a mind tired and bruised out of thought, and a desire only to take for a while the strange solace of a woman's body. Perhaps she had been inspired beyond herself that night : afterwards he perceived that she would submit herself dutifully rather than give herself understandingly ; and his heart nearly died within him.

He told her nothing of the horrors of the trenches, but only of their laughter. He said no word of Passchendaele.

So there came his hour of treachery to her. Ten days is a short time, but it was time for his loyalty to droop for an hour. The fifth day was here, and Jill was coming post-haste from a hospital in the Midlands, with three days' leave. Would he feel of Jill, whose mind had always been larger than her little sister's, that she could have given him all he wanted, had she, and not Honor, been his wife ? He would have long glorious talks with her, as in the old days, and all the time he would be feeling for his answer. This thought was very pleasant and filled him with excitement ; and that was his treachery—a treachery of the mind, and nothing more ; but he thought it a terrible thing, after the wonder of his love for Honor a few days before.

Jill came radiant with delight to see him again, and to hold his hand in both of hers, and to blush when he insisted on a brotherly kiss ; but though there went out from him all that hearty love which a man can feel for the woman he is not in love with, he was aware of a sharp joy and relief to see that she now looked much older than Honor, and was not so beautiful. And, falling into the long earnest talks, he discovered in her a vindictiveness against the Germans hardly less distressing than Honor's, and he thanked God ! Nor could he distil out of her any sympathy for the conchies, and he thanked God again.

There was only one who understood him—Peggy.

Happiness and content returned to him. He went out and walked along that road by the river where in his youth he used to hang about for Honor to come down her steps ; and there he examined the pain which had just visited him and was now gone. "I have been through all this before," he told himself ; "and

I resigned myself to loneliness ; and in loneliness I went away, only to find that I wanted Honor more than anyone else, with or without the perfect thing I had dreamed of. I will not go through that cycle again. My love for Honor cannot be less than its topmost pitch, and I touched that six days' ago, and it was good enough for any man."

The seventh day passed, and the eighth ; and how could a disloyalty endure when the moment of separation was bearing down upon them so dourly, and the shadow of Passchendaele darkened ? Death, coming close, can be a great life-giver ; and, as the spontaneous gaiety of the first days merged into the false gaiety of the last, Honor was inspired beyond herself again, and, speaking nothing of her inner thoughts, only loved him with the art and the passion of cleverer women, filling him with happiness, and with laughter at yesterday's doubts.

Victoria Station was about them again. "Good-bye, darling."

"O Tony, Tony. . . ."

"That's all right, dearest. Everything'll be all right."

"O Tony. . . ."

"Good-bye, my love. I love you better than anything else in the world."

"And I you. . . ."

At Etaples in the great Rest Camp he learned that his Brigade was marching north.

It was next morning that they told him this ; and with a morsel of information so high-seasoned he hurried back to the Officers' Lines to share it with his temporary batman.

This was none other than "Little Willie" Sparrow, whom he had discovered on the boat, somewhere between Folkestone and Boulogne. Willie, though a year older now and of full military age, seemed no different from the boy who had come to take his leave of Lieut. O'Grogan at Hill 40 in Sinai. Slender and beardless, he was of the type that must always look less than his age. He was plumper in the face no doubt—his excellent mother would have seen to that—but one might still have written him down as sixteen, and not written oneself a fool. When Tony came up to him on the deck of the boat with a "*Saïda*, Willie," the lad had shown an unaffected delight in the meeting, and was soon pouring out an explanation of his

presence in a draft for France. He had long been uneasy, he said, about his departure from the good old battalion, and when he heard that they had arrived in France he became more and more impatient to return to them.

"It's funny, isn't it, sir, how quickly you forget all the bad times and remember only the good ones, and how, after a few months in civvies and out of it all, you become restless to get back. It's nothing to do with heroism, I don't think, do you, sir?—I'm not even sure that it's altogether healthy; but there the fact is; if you've had two years of the war, you can't stand many months away from it; you begin to feel that you'd like to hear a shell again. I knew perfectly well when I rejoined at the Drill Hall that I should loathe the trenches as much as ever after the first week, but I felt frightfully excited, all the same, about coming out again. And they sent me out almost at once. The Sergeant said, 'What! You've had two years of it already! Why, you're a blooming veteran!'"

Tony smiled at the idea of a Drill Hall sergeant contenting himself with such a schoolboy epithet as "blooming"; but it was like Willie Sparrow, who was the issue of a religious home and the work of a woman, to substitute it, even in the company of soldiers, for their favourite word.

Willie did not blanch when told that the Battalion was marching by easy stages to Ypres, and that at one o'clock to-night he and his officer and their kits must be dumped and waiting on the desolate siding under the hill, where the train would start for Hazebrouck.

"Ypres! By jove, sir, how ripping!" he exclaimed. "I've always wanted to see Ypres."

"See Ypres and——" began Tony, but changed the words to "It's going to be pretty foul, you know."

"I don't mind, sir. I feel in the mood for anything. I'm going to work like the—like the dickens, and have a shot at getting my stripes."

"And I hope you get 'em," Tony encouraged; and nothing in his face showed his amusement as he pictured this youngster, with the figure and the face of a private in the Church Lads' Brigade and the manners of a junior shopwalker, exercising his command over the Joe Wylies, Art Websters and worse, when they should be floundering in the Salient mud. He tried to imagine the pleasantries of Joe Wylie at being corrected by a child and the curses of Fred Roberts, and; as the adequate

words for them came crowding into his mind, he turned away, for his lip was trembling.

For generating an atmosphere of depression there never was anything invented and set upon the hills of this planet to surpass the great Rest, Reinforcement and Details Camp on the low hills above the station at Etaples. With its railings of barbed wire, its interminable lines of grey huts, its acres of discoloured bell-tents, its dismal Salvation Army and Church Army Recreation Rooms; with its population larger than that of most cities and entirely composed of men, and of men whose thoughts were with the homes they had just left; and with a September day such as this, when the sky was grey, and the dark came down too soon—was there ever before, or will there ever be again, a factory of melancholy on the scale and with the output of Etaples? Is it one's imagining, or is it perhaps the truth, that this vast sadness which encamped here for four years, has saturated into the sandhills and the barrens about Etaples, and down into that loathly siding in the quarry under the hill, so that one cannot pass these places now, in a holiday train bound for Paris or Basle, without the melancholy that haunts it touching one with its breath?

As the light of this September day went out, Tony sat in his bell-tent, as sorrowfully as most, and thought of Honor. He had been away from her only two days and one night, and already that want of her was beginning to grow in his heart, just as it had done on the ship heading for Gallipoli when Devonport was not three days' run behind. There is but one relief for a mood like this, and it is to take a pen and write to the object of one's thoughts; so he fumbled in his pack and drew out a block of paper. He shook his fountain pen over the circular platform which was the bell-tent's floor, and as the blob of ink dropped, he observed that it added its stain to hundreds of others. The boards were speckled with them.

Those ink-stains—Tony stared at them contemplatively—what did they not mean? They meant everything that was good in common men; they were a writing on the floor whose simple characters spelt all those lovely elemental words: home, love, mother, wife, child, peace.

Tony had added his to the others, and now wrote:

"Here am I, hung up in a Rest Camp at a big base. The Rest, so far, has consisted in sleeping in a bell-tent with five other officers

on a wooden floor. But praise the Lord, I am going to be able to get back to my unit almost at once.

"Now how good you were to look upon when I was dragged away in the train from Victoria? Dammy, I could have done with a much longer holiday with you and Jill and Peggy, my most congenial companions. I have done some thinking in the long journey between there and here; I feel now as if I should never want any more than our little dug-out called Sheep's Eye, with you aboard, and we'd sneak out to every nice play at the theatre in Brighton, or we'd slip quietly into the cinemas, where it is dark and no one can track us to our hurt. God speed the day when I hang a rusty old shrapnel helmet on the wall, and fold up the khaki and put it away with camphor. Oh, if only we can finish it off and pack up this year! Think of that wonderful night when I shall sleep in sheets with every prospect of sleeping thus for ten years! Roll on, Peace; roll on!

"Plain, isn't it, that I've an attack of homesickness. Well, I'm not ashamed of it; the man who can't be homesick has poorer sensibilities than a pigeon. For a pigeon, when released, does fly at a hundred miles an hour straight home, showing what was in its little pigeon heart all the time. So it's not difficult to understand why Keatings, the old cynic, used to write home 'Dearest and best of mothers,' and even Derek, the reticent, would slop over at times.

"I can't get out of my mind that leave train at 7.50 from Victoria; the long platform crowded with men who must fight and women who mustn't weep; the porters' yell, 'Take your seats, please!' and the general disentangling of khaki figures and black figures, and all the khaki figures disappearing through the carriage doors and reappearing through the carriage windows, and all the black figures—mothers and wives and grey fathers and flapping sisters—all remaining on the platform and smiling sheepishly. It was so like the beginning of the school term in my Stratton Lye days, with all the boys travelling back to school—only the boys had grown tall and sprouted toothbrush moustaches, the mothers were getting greyer and one or two of the sisters had ceased to flap. The officers in my carriage, as soon as the train was a hundred yards from Victoria, tried to settle down to 'The Times' and 'Punch' and 'Land and Water.' But they couldn't do it. They preferred to chuck the papers on one side and look out of the window. They were by no means baser than pigeons.

"Well, I hope this term will pass quickly and we shall soon be coming home for the holidays.

"Love to Mrs. Daubeny, Joyce Daubeny, Jill Daubeny, Susan and Cook.

"Love to Mrs. O'Grogan, Peggy O'Grogan, Antony Leonard Daubeny and Michael Derek O'Grogan.

"Love to Mrs. Farrer, the Misses Wainwright, Miss Maclaren, Miss Davie, Mrs. Merrick, Colonel Philpot, P. N. Roland, etcetera.

"Love, much love to Honor O'Grogan."

It was eight-thirty. Tony posted this letter in the Camp post office, and with his trench coat around him, his pack on his back, and Willie Sparrow for his henchman, went down to the little siding under the hill.

CHAPTER V

PASSCHENDAELE I

V LAMERTINGHE, on the road from Poperinghe to Ypres. Vlamertinghe was never bullied like Ypres ; never pummelled to the ground, wall by wall ; in the autumn of 1917 most of its houses were still standing, though some gaped with shell-holes. Our business is with a single ruined room in Vlamertinghe, and all that it saw and heard on an afternoon in September, 1917.

It was a ground-floor room whose door opened immediately on to the road. Door ? There was no door ; only a splintered framework with a shell-hole on either side of it. The glass of the windows right and left of this aperture had not survived the visit of the shells but lay in shards on the floor within. The boards of the floor were very damp near the street, for the rain had been falling steadily right up to an hour ago : it had ceased now, and beyond the windows shone the light of the revisiting sun. Some shafts of it came into the deserted room, slanting from the apertures to the floor. Perhaps the unexpected smile on the weather's dreary face explained the humming of an aeroplane overhead ; but it had no relevance to the tramping of a tired battalion up the street, because battalions must drag on to Ypres, rain or shine.

Suddenly the aeroplane loosed a splutter of machine-gun fire. And again, angrily.

Loud voices echoed in the street. " Battalion, halt ! . . . Fall out. . . . Take cover. . . . "

Now twenty or more men, in full marching equipment, and with wet ground-sheets slung like capes about their shoulders, came running into the room. Their steel helmets were covered with sacking or canvas, on which they had painted with copying-ink pencil their regimental " flash." The bolts

and muzzles of their rifles were bound with oiled rags to preserve them from the rain and the rust. They unbuckled their equipment muttering curses; and threw themselves down for a brief rest, leaning back on their loaded packs. Some of them, in a mutinous defiance, flung off their equipment altogether and let it fall with a bang and a rattle on to the floor. One of them, Willie Sparrow, sunk down in something like collapse.

Private Fred Roberts remained standing while he delivered himself of a verdict: "Murder. Bloody murder, that's what it is."

Corporal Stott, who sat with his huge back resting against a corner of the room, answered him. "Ah reckon it's what he's paid for, lad."

"'Oo?" demanded Roberts threateningly. White hot-temper had ousted the bewilderment from his patient London face.

Jim cocked a thumb towards the aeroplane. "Old Jerry."

"Oh, I don't mean Jerry," said Roberts. "'E done us a kindness by comin' and pottin' at us. Forced that murderin' swine to give us a halt."

As he mentioned the swine he jerked his head towards the doorway and the street.

At this moment Joe Wylie limped in, leading a mongrel dog which was his latest pet. This afternoon he looked perhaps the slovenliest soldier in the British Army. His khaki slacks, which had not recovered from a recent spell at the cook-house, were more black than brown; his puttees wandered drunkenly round the calves of his brackety legs; his long Roman nose had reddened under the weather and was dripping, not with rain, but with its own natural moisture; and his old-fashioned Edwardian moustache was in as sorry a case as if he had lately dipped it in a bucket of water. He brushed the back of his wrist under his nose to knock away the discomfortable drip, and kept his hand knowingly over his mouth, as his manner was when he was about to be delivered of a jest, especially if it was a rude one; and the present delivery was a rude one. Indicating the dog with a cock of his eye, he said:

"'E had to fall out on the right of the road. But I sor to it that he was quick abaht it, with old Jerry overhead."

Such of the men as were not too exhausted and dispirited rewarded him with a laugh.

"Joo reckon we're nearly there, Joe?" asked his friend, Art Webster.

"Nah!" Joe assured him most cheerfully. "Nah! We've only jest started, and there's a lot more rain to come yet."

"Well, the rain keeps old Jerry off, any road," said Corporal Stott, who had heard the rumbles of mutiny and, like a good N.C.O., was meeting them with a tactful assuagement.

Fred Roberts broke in again. "I wish I could 'a' stopped one of Jerry's bullets, I tell you straight I do. Anything's better than this slow murder. Twenty bloody miles from Worm'out to Poperinghe, and now abaht another twenty miles to Ec-prez!"

"Yepp," agreed another man, from his place against one of the walls. "And mostly over cobbles!"

Roberts looked out of the doorway again.

"'E's got 'is 'orse."

"Yah!" agreed Art Webster, ever ready to echo a dominant opinion. "A mutiny's what *he* wants."

"He'll get it before I'm much older," said Roberts. "That'll finish me, maybe, but it'll finish 'im as a Colonel too."

"How many lads have fallen out?" asked a man.

"Not above twenty," Jim Stott answered pacifically.

"But Sergeant Connan's one of 'em," a voice reminded them. "I've never seen a sergeant fall out before."

"Well, I don't blame him," said Roberts. "Beggared if I go much further!"

"Joo think we'll have to go up to the attack directly we get in?" asked someone.

"*Course* we shall," said Roberts. "When they sharpen all our bayonets, and put the officers into tommy's kit and keep back a sprinkling of officers and N.C.O.s on the Dump to make a new battalion out of, in case us fellers never come back no more, it means——" he nodded his head significantly, leaving its meaning to the imagination of his hearers.

"Yes," agreed Art Webster sadly, "it means we're going up to the Doings . . ."

A silence acknowledged the truth of this.

"'Oo's winning this 'ere Passchendaele battle?" asked another voice.

Joe Wylie, who had now arranged his dog and was about to sit down, turned and repeated the question in the manner of a comedy duo.

"'Oo's winnin'?"

"Yes."

"'Oo's winnin', yer say?"

"Yes."

"We're both of us winnin', ain't we?" he asked; and sat down.

A man, who had not so far spoken, offered his remark.

"I can do one more mile," he said, "and then I'm finished, British Empire or no British Empire."

"That's right," endorsed Roberts. "I'm jest about through with it too. If the battalion arrives with a quarter of its men I shall be surprised. And I'm praying to the devil it won't. If we was all to act together——" the rest was supplied by a setting of the jaw and a grim nod.

Some sullen murmurings supported him, followed by the silence of exhausted and miserable men.

It was Joe Wylie who broke the silence.

"Did I ever tell you this one, boys?"

"Not aboov a hoondred times, I reckon, Joe," said Jim Stott, laughing; and there was a relief in his tone, "but get on with it."

"Did I ever tell you how I came to join this rotten crah'd?"

"No. Get on with it, Joe," said Jim.

"Well, I went to the Recruiting Sergeant, and he was all over me with 'is welcomin' smiles; and he says, 'Yes, me lad, what can I do for you?' So I says, 'I thought abah't joining this army of yours.' And 'e says, 'Yes, well, thank you very much. I shall be pleased to do anything I can for you.'" (Laughter.) He says, "'What regiment would you like?' I says, 'What?' He says, 'What regiment would you like? The Kevelry?' And I says, 'Nah! I don't want the Kevelry.' So he says, 'Would you like to be an awficer?' So I says, 'What are they?' And he says, 'Why, those there are awficers.' So I says, 'Nab! I don't want to be one of them little fellers.'" (Much laughter.) "So he goes on, 'Well, what abah't the Infantry?' And I says, 'They're the fellers that do the marchin', aren't they?' 'Wurl,' he says; 'just a little nah and then.'" (Laughter.) "Aw, I turned *them* dah'n all right. So he asks, 'What abah't the artillery? Nice lads, the artillery are; oh, awful nice lads.' And I says, 'They're the gunners, aren't they?' He says, 'Yurse!' And I says, 'That's me lot.' And he says, 'Thank you so much. Gunners,

you said? Right. Thank you for calling.' And he shook hands with me and smiled me ah't. Next mornin' I rolls up, and he says, 'You go to the Royal West Essex and git a move on about it.' So I began, 'But them's infantry, and you said——' but then he bellers me dah'n, 'Get and do what you're told, you stinking lah'sy scum. Don't answer back! *You're in the army now!*'"

The men, momentarily forgetting their misery, laughed delightedly; and Joe enjoyed the tale as much as any of them and repeated the last words at a higher pitch: "'Don't answer me back!'" e says. 'You're in the army now!'"

"Gawd! you're some liar, Joe!" said a soldier.

Joe brushed his finger along his nose and pursued his success.

"And did I ever tell you this one? When I was standing with the crah'd watchin' the West Essex getting fell in, in August, 1914——"

"Oh, shut up with your joking," Roberts suddenly interjected. He saw that the mutinous threats of a minute ago were being dissolved in laughter. "There's things best not joked about but resisted. We don't want to forget that we're being treated worse than cattle. If we all stood together he couldn't shoot the lot of us, could he?"

"Nah, he couldn't do that," Joe admitted, though obviously anxious to continue his entertainment. "Nah, he couldn't do that, bust him, but did I ever tell you this one? Did I ever tell you abah't——"

But he didn't tell them that afternoon, for Captain Scrase stood in the doorway glancing round his men. Scrase was wearing the tunic of a tommy, with three stars on its shoulder-straps, and instead of his Sam Browne, a webbing belt.

"Bit tired, men?" he inquired, pleasantly.

"Oh no, sir," Joe answered in friendly impudence. "We're just loving it. Jest beginnin' to get the real feel of the road."

"Well, we're not far from our map reference now. Three miles'll see us in."

"Three more miles," muttered Fred Roberts, aside. "Hell!"

The Colonel appeared behind Scrase.

"There he is!" hissed Roberts. "There's the s——!"

"Oh, Scrase," called the Colonel; and Scrase went out to him, so that they stood together, out of earshot of the men. "Is this true about Sergeant Connan, that he fell out about half an hour ago?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then, by heaven, put O'Grogan on your horse and send him to find Connan and to tell him that if he doesn't catch up with the battalion in ten minutes I'll put him under arrest."

"Yes, sir."

"N.C.O.s *don't* fall out. God, when it's all we shall be able to do to get the men in to-night, to have a sergeant setting the example of falling out!"

"Could he have my horse a bit, sir!" asked Scrase.

"Hell, no. Can the men have horses?"

"He dropped as he walked, sir."

"Then he'll drop a rank or two in the army. I'm having no weaklings for sergeants in this battalion. How are these men?"

"Pretty well exhausted, sir."

"The devil they are! Then help them along with the rough edge of your tongue a bit. They'll need it after Sergeant Connan's behaviour."

"I find it hard to strafe them, sir." An utterable weariness escaped in Scrase's accents.

"You've got to, man!"

No sympathy sounded in the Colonel's voice. Its hardness just then was even excessive. But perhaps the softer man, whom everyone knew to be hidden behind this hoarding of Prussianism, peeped out as he continued more quietly: "It's when men are at breaking-point that you must curse them as never before . . . because if you speak kindly to them they break down. . . ."

"Yes, sir."

"God! if we start pitying them now, and they start pitying themselves, what about a few days hence when they're floundering in the mud, under fire? . . . No, I never heard such nonsense."

He hesitated a few seconds; turned; and entered the room.

"Here, you men! Who said you could throw off your equipment? Put it on again. You can undo it, that's all. Hurry up! Get a move on about it! You've got to be ready to shift any moment."

His eye fell on Willie Sparrow, who had collapsed to the ground like a tumbled scarecrow and was now staring bemusedly at him as if asleep with eyes still open. "Get up and try and look like a soldier. Haven't you a spine at all?"

The quick eye swept round and perceived the sullen,

threatening slowness in the movements of Fred Roberts; and to him he shouted in a voice that made even that mutineer shrink: "*Will you hurry, man!* If that equipment isn't on in ten seconds, you'll spend to-morrow tied to a limber-wheel. I know that look of yours and, by God, I'll break it! Listen here, men: anyone who falls out between now and the end of the march will explain the reason why at Orderly Room to-morrow. Beginning to be sorry for yourselves, because you've half a blister on your foot, when there's men ahead of you dying in shell-holes with hardly any feet at all!"

And then, as ill chance would have it, his eye alighted on Joe Wylie. "And what the devil are you?"

"Mr. O'Grogan's batman, sir."

"But heavens alive! Look at your slacks, man. What do you mean by parading like that?"

"I used to be in the cook ah'se, sir. It's a dirty job, cookin'."

"Oh, is it? Let me see you looking like that when we get in and I'll find you a damn-sight dirtier job on Defaulters. I warn you all: any slovenly marching, and when the battalion gets in to-night, you'll go back to the last halt and march it all over again."

He turned to give his parting thrust to Joe Wylie. "And you: get out of my sight. I'm ashamed to have a soldier like you under my command. Come with me, Scrase."

Roberts watched the two officers go out into the street. His head nodded in contempt and hatred. "And now go and get on yer 'orse," he said to the Colonel's back.

"And *Gawd* . . . *blister* . . . his *buttocks* . . . when he gets there," added Joe Wylie, with deep feeling.

Unheeding, Roberts faced round upon the men, who were seating themselves again. "Are you going to fall for that sort of thing?"

"Got to, I suppose," Joe Wylie shrugged. And he had just pulled out his mouth-organ and was shaping a tune on it when the moan of an oncoming shell pricked up all ears, and the men ducked down and stayed down, till they heard the shell detonate some hundred yards away. A voice muttered, "Christ! that was close."

"Yon aeroplane reported us, Ah reckon," Jim Stott suggested.

Another shell was whining towards them, and all ducked; and some of the more exhausted men uttered exclamations of misery and despair. The explosion sounded in the same place.

They were just straightening themselves again when a third shell came and moaned **over** their salaaming heads and joined the others. Joe, with his face still in the floor, began to chant, "One a penny, two a penny, roipe bananas;" and then, looking up and seeing the shell-holes on either side of the doorway, sang, "The shell-holes round the door, Make me love mother more;" while the men, since no more shells seemed on the way, resumed their seated positions.

"What we want," said Roberts, "is a bit of the spirit of the trade unions. Fair conditions or nothing doing."

"Eh, boot they've got us on toast all right," laughed Jim Stott. "We can't do that or we should let t'Huns through, tha knows."

"I don't see that we should be any the worse off if they *did* come," said Roberts.

Many voices murmured their agreement, and then all seemed to sink again into their exhaustion and despondency. There was silence; a silence for Joe to break.

"Did I ever tell you this one, boys?"

"Aye, sure as muk," said Jim Stott, "but it's time tha gev it 'em agen. There's soom you've noan tow'd it to, 'appen."

"It's abaht lice."

"About *what*?"

"Lice. There's one bin tickling me a bit, and it reminded me of a feller in the Awstrylian Light 'Orse. Never 'eard the story of the Awstrylian? Oh, it's a great 'un. There was an Awstrylian sittin' in a trench on Gallipoli, and along come his Brigadier—and, well, you know how Awstrylians talk to their Brigadiers?"

"Yes." All agreed that they knew that.

"Well, the Brigadier sees that the Awstrylian had his riding breeks on the wrong way rahn'd, seams ah'tward; and he says, 'Ello, digger!' he says; 'wodger got your breeks on inside ah't for?' And the Awstrylian says, 'Wurl, Brig.,' he says, 'it's loike this: if we turns our breeks inside ah't, these little fellers 'ave to walk all the way dah'n the seams and rahn'd to the other side if they're to draw any rations at all.'" (Laughter.) "'And when we can feel that they've got rahn'd, we turn our breeks *inside* in again, and then the little fellers 'ave to do their journey all over again; and when they've done it, we turns our breeks rahn'd a third time, and off they 'ave to march again, and Brig., it breaks their bloody 'arts.'"

A great laugh greeted the story; and in it, unbeknown to all, the spirit of mutiny was disabled again.

Meanwhile the shafts of sunlight had disappeared, and the pattering of rain sounded in the road.

"'Ello!" called Joe. "Git ready, boys. It's raining now, so they'll take us out for a rinse again."

And at the same instant there was the report of a British howitzer, and a shell moaned past on its way to the enemy's lines.

"Hear that?" Joe shouted excitedly. "That's one of our batteries answerin' the feller that opened on us!"

The gunfire continued; and there was the roar of a low ascending aeroplane.

"Gaw!" cried Art Webster. "They're awf to put 'paid' to *his* account. Gahn! give it 'im 'ot!"

From the street came the shouts of officers and N.C.O.s. "Fall in, men. . . . Fall in. . . . Fall in."

All in the room climbed to their feet, and buckled up their equipment. Joe attached his dog, as Scrase, looking in, said: "Come on, men. Hurry up."

"Only sixty more miles, ain't it, sir?" asked Joe.

"Yes, Joe; and perhaps a bit more," laughed Scrase. "Stick it out."

"And do they give us an hour on the treadmill after that?"

"Yes, I expect so. . . . Hurry up, men."

Scrase departed.

"*I'm* not hurrying for no one," said the sullen Roberts. "D'you mean to say you're going to take *his* bullying without a kick of any sort?"

"'Oo's?" asked Joe.

"The Colonel."

"Oh, '*im*. Don't you worry about 'im, Freddy. He may strafe us, but there's one consolation"—Joe whispered the consolation, nodding very confidentially—"he's probably afcared of the Sergeant-Major."

This drew another laugh from his mates, and in the universal good-humour one of them called out, "Fall in, the Guards!"

"Don't say 'Fall in, the *Guards*!'" corrected Joe beseechingly, as they all filed out. "'Fall in, the *Guard*' is the right expression. '*Guards*?' Gaw! Not to fellers like these. Why, the Guards are a *fine* body of men." (Much laughter.) "Come on! Only six more sky-lines, boys."

A few minutes later the deserted room heard the tramping of hundreds of feet past its window, and the music of a mouth-organ playing, "There's a Friend for little children."

They camped in the flat meadows behind Ypres. A few huts, and some tents, each surrounded with a low wall of sandbags, were awaiting them there. A cemetery, enclosed in barbed wire, spread itself at the camp's side. Joe Wylie, pointing to it as they filed in, shouted "There's the Rest Camp, boys. Jest a little turn in the trenches, and we come back there and be reely comfortable." They had not been long in the tents before they learned that the next evening at dusk they would go forward and join the 14th battalion in Railway Wood.

The officers grimaced at one another.

Scrase, as usual, revealed none of his thoughts by word or manner. Not once, since they came to France, had he reported to Tony of the fear that haunted him; nor had Tony, in these places, thought it wise even to hint at the conversations which they had had together in the Desert of Sinai. He knew that their friendship was strong and deep, but that it drew back shyly from spoken words. Throughout these months Scrase's manner, except for a few lapses when the weariness escaped into his voice, had been that of a keen, punctilious Company Commander, who took pride in his efficiency. Only Tony knew that he was acting; Colonel Tappiter suspected it, perhaps; and so did that hidden Moulden, who watched from behind his steady, friendly—his all too steady and friendly—gaze. And to-night Scrase had donned the best garb of liveliness he could drag from his bag of stage properties. If he sank into abstraction at times, well, others were doing that too. And the stutter that occasionally invaded his speech, and the catch in his breathing that halted it once or twice—who but Tony even noticed these symptoms? Moulden, perhaps.

And Moulden himself: had he his private fears? Devil knew: Tony had retired from the effort to know. The man showed nothing of himself. He affected the uniform wear of sardonic humour which others bore so naturally; and, as always, it seemed to fit him but poorly.

As for Tony, his throat was alight with the same excitement

that had possessed him before Romani and before El Arish ; the same impatient restlessness which lit one's brain like wine and was all the more stimulating because pungently flavoured with hints of death or physical pain. To-night it was a stronger wine than ever in Sinai. The battle was certain this time : the German Line was there—dour, full-front, rooted, terrible—it couldn't melt into the desert like the Turkish redan at El Arish. To-night it was certain that within twenty-four hours—or forty-eight or ninety hours—he would have won his fame or be lying dead.

The next afternoon, smoking a cigarette at his tent door, he saw Padre Quickshaw loafing thoughtfully towards them, over the threadbare grass. No more to-day in France than yesterday in Sinai did the little man look like an officer ; his tin helmet, pushed back from a moist forehead, was covered with the usual sacking envelope ; his tunic, stained with grease and mud, was gathered in by a tommy's webbing belt, and since it was too large and loose for him, having been bought from Ordnance, it pleated itself into the belt like a woman's blouse ; his breeches were the same coarse whipcord riding breeches that he had worn in Sinai ; and his boots, now caked with mud, were the high artillery boots of the gunners.

"Good morning," said he, when near enough to the C Company officers.

"Mornin', padre."

"You're going to Railway Wood to-night, aren't you ?"

"Yes."

"Lord, what a spot ! I've been there for the last three days with the 14th."

"How are they getting on, padre ?"

"Not too brightly."

"Have they been over the top yet ?"

"Yes, worse luck."

"Many casualties ?"

"Oh, only about half of 'em. The French are mutinying, so we're carrying on the war in the meantime. That's what the battle of Passchendaele is about, as far as I can make out."

"*Sh ! Sh !*" Scrase rebuked him, feigning dismay at such frankness. "We can crime you for setting rumours about. But, padre : who's dead in the 14th ?"

"Rodgers and Mayne, and young Oakley, and Major Hudson, and Lord Ayr."

These answers of Quickshaw came out of him as dully and impersonally as the offerings of an automatic machine; evidently his thoughts, like his eyes, were elsewhere.

"Going up to-night, you said?" he asked, suddenly.

"Even so," Scrase admitted.

"What time?" The question was thrown out in an apparent carelessness.

"Parade about five."

"H'm. . . . Well . . . I don't know when I shall be able to get to you again, so I think I'll have a service here this afternoon. Yes; may as well have it to-day as any other time."

"Quite, padre."

"Yes," affirmed Quickshaw. "I think it had better be a Communion Service, hadn't it?"

"Just as you like, padre." Scrase smiled a general blessing on all his acts.

"Yes; then those who want to communicate can, and those who don't can just join in the prayers, if they like. That'll be all right, won't it?"

"Quite, padre. No complaints."

"Think any of 'em'll come?"

"Oh, yes . . . one or two."

"I'll have it in the open, I think. They'll be more likely to roll up then—they're such fools!"

"Yes; a door *does* frighten them rather."

"I know. They make me sick, like that. . . . Well, I'll go and see old Tappiter about it, and then wander round and tell the men."

Tony watched him as he poked his head into the C.O.'s tent, omitting to salute, and, after a talk with the Colonel within, strolled away among the men, now speaking to a group of them, and now disappearing into a hut or tent. He guessed that Quickshaw was repeating to them his "May as well have it to-day as any other time. Don't know when I shall get to you again," and uttering it as casually as possible, since neither he nor any one of them could have spoken without abashment of a grander reason for waiting on God at three o'clock of a week-day afternoon, in a meadow west of Ypres. Sympathy for the little man welled up in Tony, and he became as anxious for the success of the service as Quickshaw himself could be—though Quickshaw's anxiety, presumably, was for

God's sake, and Tony's for Quickshaw's. He resolved to do some parish visiting himself and induce a few men to come to the service, that their presence might encourage the others and the padre be not disappointed.

He began with himself. Yes, he would attend, but he would not receive—oh, he would have liked to-day to possess the faith of his childhood and to be able to bow his head before a Master present in the meadow. But he had no such faith, and it was useless to pretend that he had. Still, he would kneel with the others and try to pray, and perhaps his example would be of help to simpler men.

This point at rest, he walked among the batmen to impress them into the good work. And here he became quite uplifted by success. With Willie Sparrow, who was Harold's servant now, he had no difficulty. He just mentioned the service and said, "You'll be coming along, I suppose, Willie?" and the boy answered, "Oh, rather, sir!" Art Webster, who had always had an eye turned towards religion, though up to now, it must be confessed, his eye had never exercised any restraint over the irreverent lips beneath—Art Webster proved an easy capture too. He was bent over a canvas bucket, washing Moulden's shirt, and he perked up an ear to catch these exchanges between Mr. O'Grogan and "young Sparrer"; then straightened himself up and came forward.

"Beg pardon, sir; but do you think it'd be all right if I come too. I mean, I ain't bin properly to church—aw! not for donkey's years—and I suppose I'm not—well, you know what I mean, sir—not absolutely Ir, as the saying goes, but I was brought up religious, and once I as near as possible got confirmed, sir. I was sent to me classes, but got cuttin' of 'em, and the minister thought I'd better wait a bit longer."

"If you want to come, of course you can," said his officer.

"Thank you, sir. Then I think I will. Yes, I'd like to come."

"But I'm afraid if you've never been confirmed, you won't be able to——"

"Oh no, sir. I understand, sir." Webster accepted this ruling with the humility of all good sinners. "I never thought o' doin' *that*, sir."

Joe Wylie was a more difficult problem. Tony, seeing him engaged with a jack-knife and a hunk of cheese, and hearing

him send the last of a dubious story to the men in the tent behind and guffaw with laughter over it, was tempted to play the part of Jonah when sent to preach to Nineveh; to turn about, that is, and journey in the opposite direction. But he meditated a moment and then spoke.

"Hallo, Wylie. . . . Look here, the padre's going to have a service."

"What, sir?"

"There's going to be a service this afternoon."

"Where, sir?"

"Here."

"Oh my Gawd!"

This was discouraging; but Tony carried on.

"It's voluntary of course; but you've got to come too—just to help it along."

"Me, sir!"

"Yes."

"Me? Gawd forgive yer, sir."

"Yes, you. Everybody's coming, and so are you."

"No, thank you, sir, if you down mind. I got a bit aht of this church business."

"Rubbish. Ever been confirmed?"

"Bin *what*, sir?"

"Confirmed by a bishop?"

"Oh, *that*? Nah, sir; not on your life! I remember when I was a nipper, our minister wanted to do me; but I slipped it all right. Then Mr. Quickshaw, 'e got at me about it. But it's no bon, sir; these stunts to make you good jest don't come awf. I told 'im I'd tried it before. Tib, my missus—I've told you about Tib, haven't I—she had a time—lor' bless me, it makes me laugh, if you knew Tib—she had a religious time, when she was always wanting me to go to her meetings, and between 'em, they nearly got me: the old preacher, he was that impressive and holy I decided—all on a sudden like—that it was time I pulled up me socks and got shut of me sins. But I tried it, sir"—Joe made a deprecatory *mon* with his mouth—"and it didn't come awf—sum-hah."

"Yes, but—look here, it can't do you any harm to come to this service."

"No, I wouldn't say as it'd do that."

"Well, I want you to come to oblige the padre. You

needn't take any part beyond being there. I want to get him a good congregation to start with. Will you come?"

"Wurl, if you put it like that, sir——"

"Yes, you enjoy singing hymns."

"Wurl, I down mind if I do, sir."

"Excellent."

"Is it soon, sir?"

"Almost at once, I think."

"Gaw! I'll go and get a bit of a rinse."

The sun came to church that afternoon: it burst from behind a cloud and played upon the camp table which Padre Quickshaw was setting up in an open space of the field and covering with a linen cloth. And against Tony's expectations, a large number of men, coming singly or in small groups, began to assemble at a respectful distance from the table, and to stand about there, looking very uncomfortable; while Quickshaw arranged his silver vessels and drew over his head a crumpled surplice and tossed a green stole about his neck. The surplice, which was a short one so that he could push it into a pocket, reached no further than his khaki knees; and it promptly fell to the right side, as if to balance the green stole which worked its way downwards to the left. Some officers were strolling up now, and Tony watched them, much interested to see who would come. Here was Childe Harold, polished up as if for a King's Parade, and trying to look at ease—bravo, Harold! for, as Tony knew, the boy had been feeling ill all day; here was Moulden—what were *his* secret motives for coming along? and here was Scrase—fancy Scrase, the intellectual rebel, attending church! No Hughes Anson—no, Rosy was not the sort who would come to church, even to set an example. No Aylwin—of course not, nasty little intellectual snob! Tony turned his head to see how the congregation behind was getting on, for by now he was feeling a personal interest in it. Oh, fine! there must be a hundred men standing about, and more were coming along, in ones and twos, from the tents—almost running—encouraged by the fact that such an ample crowd had preceded them and therefore they need not appear ridiculous.

When Quickshaw had completed his preparations, he knelt on the muddy earth before his altar; whereupon some of the officers, wondering if they were doing right, and glancing at their neighbours to see what *they* were doing, knelt down

also; and immediately the men near-by copied them; and those behind, in a series of rapid instalments, copied their brothers, since none had the least desire to be left standing. And it was when they were all kneeling thus that Colonel Tappiter, with belt and boots and buttons shining, came slowly across the field from his tent and knelt behind his men.

But Padre Quickshaw had knelt only to say a private prayer. He arose, and turning about, was surprised to see all his congregation on its knees.

"No—oh Lord, no—you needn't kneel," he explained impatiently. "As you were! Not in this ghastly mud. It'll be enough if those of you"—he paused because they were all getting up now, and he wanted to be heard—"if those of you who are going to receive will just kneel when the time comes. The rest of you—I want you to enjoy this service, if you can. It's good stuff, you know. There's the Confession, you see . . . and the Absolution . . . and the Blessing . . . And we'll have a hymn or two. Now, if you'll—eh, what? what's that?"

This was sharply addressed to a tall, grey-haired corporal, quite unknown to the battalion, who had appeared from a hut where a detachment of the R.A.M.C. was billeted; and now a whispering conversation ensued between him and Quickshaw, while the service waited. An odd couple they made: the tall, well-built R.A.M.C. corporal, smart with his grey hair and his trim khaki, looking down, but with deference, upon the padre; and the short, spare padre, in his crumpled surplice and dangling stole, looking up at the corporal, with that expression of his which was meant for friendliness but always resembled a goggle-eyed indignation. Those nearest the whisperers heard Quickshaw say, "Of course, if you like . . . certainly . . . thank you. . . . Yes, by all means. . . ."

After the conversation the corporal did not fall back and join the congregation, but, much to everybody's surprise, stayed one pace to the rear and the right of Quickshaw, with his face to the altar like an acolyte.

Quickshaw announced a hymn—not a very original hymn, but an easy one: "O God, our help in ages past;" and the congregation sang it well, so that the men in the tents and huts came to their doors to look on. Then in a loud voice, because he had every intention of being heard, he carried the

service through to the Consecration Prayer, before which he turned round and asked the men to keep their heads bowed. And when he had said the prayer in a very low voice, and himself partaken of the sacred elements, and given them before anyone else to the grey-haired corporal at his side, he took the chalice and put it into this man's hands, and they both faced the congregation, Quickshaw with the paten uplifted before his breast and the corporal with the chalice. This corporal of the R.A.M.C. was an Anglican priest..

A long pause. Either there was no man who cared to approach the sacrament first and presumptuously, or a British respect for rank lived even in the presence of Him before Whom all rank is as nothing, so that no man would go before his Colonel; but Padre Quickshaw was compelled to crane his head and telegraph a look to Colonel Tappiter, who straight-way took off his spectacles and came forward—was not the padre in command? Colonel Tappiter came up a lane which had opened itself between the standing men; and very many fell in behind and followed him.

CHAPTER VI

PASSCHENDAELE II

NOW it was dusk ; and they were marching through the city of Ypres, up towards the murmuring throb of the battle ; and in the half-darkness the eyes of all, men and officers both, were turning left and right to feed upon the interest around them. It was the first time they had come by these spectral ruins, and, though for two years the world had been showing them its battlefields, they were as interested in this, the war's crowning and immortal desolation, as any civilian sightseer paying the pilgrimage of a day to the scene of war. They were thrilled, good simple men ; thrilled as they passed the cascaded tower of the Cathedral and the pallid fangs of the Cloth Hall ; thrilled to think that their feet were tramping the cobbles of the Grande Place of Ypres ; and that their eyes were meeting a signpost which pointed right with the words, "To the Menin Gate." The Menin Gate ! Veterans of Gallipoli and Sinai, they felt much like a school of children who were being led among sacred places ; in their deep interest they forgot that themselves were going forward to do a thing no different from that which all the ghostly battalions had done, who had gone this way before and given their sanctity to these stones.

"To the Menin Gate, boys !" Why, soon they would be treading the famous Menin Road. Soon they would be seeing Hell Fire Corner !

Oh, if there was a stirring in the blood of all, even the dullest, what was the turmoil in the heart of Lieut. O'Grogan, who wanted to write poetry ? This—this was the Menin Gate ! One couldn't grasp the thought. Those twin piles of bricks, were they the original pillars of the gate ? He and his men were clattering over a wooden bridge—"Break step—Break step, damn you"—and he turned and looked behind : then

those were the city ramparts, and that moat or stream the Yser water! Think of it! All Britain, warring in France, had sooner or later come out through that gate and clattered over the bridge and trod this *pavé*. All, for was there a brigade that sooner or later didn't come to do its *devoir* in the Salient? The First Battle of Ypres had had to be fed with men, and the Second, and all the following years. Years! Yes, three years now; and all the time they had been pouring through the gate—the city clerks of London, the squat little mill-hands of Lancashire, the tough miners of Wales, the tall farm-lads from the Home Counties, the dare-devil giants from Australia—marching neither to victory nor to defeat, but simply into liquid mud, intensive bombardments, gas and bombs; for the line round Ypres had hardly moved in all the years. Like Verdun, it had held, that was all; and the enemy did not pass.

The head of the column was now beyond the few houses that stood outside the gate, and only the last company was yet clattering over the bridge; and in the thickening darkness a silence had fallen upon all the men, when suddenly two foot-sore and mud-bespattered Highlanders, returning into Ypres, with a third lagging twenty paces behind, trudged wearily into the view of C Company, and instantly Joe Wylie called out, "That's all that's left of *that* battalion, boys!" and earned his roar of laughter.

Love and pride caught at Tony's heart. Ah yes, it was in such a manner, and with such a national music, that Britain passed through the Menin Gate.

Now he too was beyond the buildings, and the open country stretched away in slight undulations on either side of the *pavé*. Nothing human was to be seen upon its face, for the dug-outs of the innumerable batteries were beneath the ground. Only here and there a light glimmered from some dug-out door; and far away to the north there was a little conflagration where the camouflage over a gun had taken fire. A reek—the familiar reek of Gallipoli and of the Romani sands—the reek of a world at war—came blowing in from the west. Also a scent of pear-drops—yes, unmistakable: tear gas was falling somewhere. He swept his eyes around the horizon and saw a ring of flashes and flares making an everlasting scintillation on the night sky; almost a complete ring; the ring of the Salient. God! he was within the Salient; could

he believe it? This Salient, it was the theatre, surely, of one of the world's strangest victories. Not a spectacular forward march, but—what? A strange immobilized triumph that had lasted from Britain's first contact with the enemy three years ago till now; till this hour when he himself came to the Salient and saw it standing all about him as it had stood any time in the years—unbroken and not to be broken, filthy and despairing, but unconquerable. Such an uncomely triumph, won by sick-hearted men in an atmosphere of grumblings, blasphemies and jests! This Salient, ringed round with fire, was the apotheosis of nothing more beautiful than Obstinacy; but was not Obstinacy perhaps, in the final count, as grand a thing as human nature could show? Had human nature found a nobler type than Prometheus, bound, defeated, defiant and conquering? And as he thought of Prometheus, he remembered—who would not?—the words that Shelley cried to him, and so wonderful was their aptness that he was startled; they seemed to speak for him so perfectly the meaning of the Salient; to sing that strange uncomely triumph which his eyes had been dimly seeing—and oh, as he thought of them he felt he could throw away for ever his anxiety about personal fame and cared for nothing but to take his place, lonely and unwitnessed, among other men in the glory of the Salient:

To suffer woes which hope thinks infinite :
To forgive wrongs darker than death or night,
To defy Power which seems omnipotent ;
To love and bear ; to hope till hope creates
From its own wreck the thing it contemplates ;
Neither to change, nor falter, nor repent :
This, like thy glory, Titan, is to be
Good, great, and joyous, beautiful and free ;
This is alone Life, Joy, Empire, and Victory.

All the stars were out to-night, the rain after its six days of unremitting labour keeping a holiday on the seventh. But no doubt it would begin again to-morrow. The rumble and beat of the guns, and the tapping of small-arm fire, were there as always. To this everlasting back-curtain of sound our story has given but scanty description because it was both there and not there: the men had almost ceased to hear it,

even as sleepers in an Alpine hut cease after a while to hear the beat of the wind in the mountains. It was just in its place, like the sky overhead or the earth beneath their feet.

The platoons were marching with long intervals between them, for fear of direct hits by the shells; and Tony, whose eyes were now used to the dark, could see that the leading men had turned to the left and were plodding across country. They seemed to be on a raised embankment, for their steel helmets, and the muzzles of their rifles went along silhouetted against the sky.

Now his own platoon was at the turning-point, and he saw that a railway track cut the road here and ran along between the buried batteries. At the angle of railway track and *pavé* stood a notice board: "Hell Fire Corner." So this was the infamous spot! Funny to be taking it thus casually in one's stride! A railway track, did we say? devil a rail was left, or a sleeper, and not very much of the track; but one could just recognize it for what it was, because its line ran straight through the shell-pocked country. *Railway Wood*. Of course: the wood to which they were going must have taken its name from this line and would lie somewhere alongside of it.

Oh, sluggard's imagination! Even up to this minute Tony was picturing Railway Wood as an assembly of high, if charred and splintered, tree trunks. But nothing of the sort. It wasn't on the surface of the ground at all, but underneath it. They arrived at a rounded tumulus of glistening mud, with low lintelled doorways in its side, like the entrances to mine shafts or mine adits; and not a tree, not a trunk, not a stump lifted itself above the mud. The trees were long ago slain.

They filed into one of the shafts; it had a stair which went down and down and down. At the bottom was a long low gallery dimly lit by electric light. Its floor streamed with water, which reflected the sparse lamps, for to-night the drainage system had failed to cope with yesterday's rain. Off this corridor, which must be fifteen feet or more below the surface, there were narrow cells in which six, eight, or a dozen men could be housed; and Scrase was directing the men into these. Where the ground had sunk the water stood in stagnant pools; and as they splashed through it, they stirred up a smell of sewage. One guessed that though there were latrines in these underground galleries the less scrupulous men neglected

to use them. The roof was not high enough for Tony to walk upright, so he removed his helmet and splashed on with crouching shoulders. Once his skull struck a low beam, and, rushing his hand to the painful bruise, he felt that it was wet, not with blood, but with the moisture that was percolating down from the soaked earth above.

For themselves the C Company officers found a room eight feet long with a table and two crude benches, one of which stood in an inch of water.

"So this is Railway Wood!" said Moulden, flinging off helmet and pack.

"Can you beat it?" demanded Childe Harold cheerfully, but his teeth were chattering.

"It's a pretty little spinney," said Tony.

"I wonder they don't call it Bluebell Wood," said Scrase. "Its scents are those of the spring."

And Aylwin gave a learned description of the methods employed by the Tunnelling Company which had made it, of its drainage system, its electric light plant, and its present garrison of R.E.s.

"Well, that may be," laughed Harold, his teeth still chattering, "but I guess it's fine, sitting in a sewer. We've been moles; now we're sewer rats."

"Where shall we sleep?" asked Moulden.

"Scrase, being O.C., will sleep on the table," said Aylwin, "and Moulden by his side—*good-night!* what a bed-fellow! O'Grogan'll have one bench and I the other, and Harold will sleep in the water on the floor."

"Oh, will he!" scoffed the Childe.

Childe Harold was labouring to be cheerful, but Tony kept an anxious eye roaming his way. The boy had confided to him that afternoon, with much reviling of fate, that all the symptoms of a slight fever were shivering through his body. "I didn't mean to tell anyone, Bungay," he had said, "but I think I shall feel better if I let loose a grumble on you. Isn't it the thickest luck ever? It was that rain yesterday that did it. I got chilled through. I feel absolutely bloody. And I can't go sick. It would be too awful to go sick just when my platoon is really going to war. I'll stick it out, but Jehoshaphat! I do feel putrid."

And now in the wretched light of a single electric bulb Tony studied the boy; he could see the shivering of his body

and the autonomous vibration of his jaw as he sat hunched forward.

And as they sat on bench and table, their silence expressing the gloom they would not speak in words, they suddenly turned their ears towards a thudding overhead, as of shells which were failing to detonate; their contact with the ground could be heard—or felt; but no muffled explosion. And immediately the cry came down the corridor, “Gas! . . . Gas! . . .”

Scrase swore; he ordered Moulden to run and see that the blanket gas-curtain was lowered at the entrance of the shaft; and himself ran out, struggling with his gas-mask, to ensure that the men were putting on theirs. Tony followed, after shouting to Harold and Aylwin to stay where they were. Before he could get the mouthpiece between his teeth and the pincers at his nostrils he smelt the whiff of phosgene.

Their tasks done, they returned to the room, and all five officers resumed their gloomy session on benches and table. They just sat there like goblins, with their faces in the hideous masks and their feet in the water. Their lips were silenced, because you cannot speak in a gas-mask without removing the mouthpiece; their eyes were blinded, because the heat, exuded from their skins, had quickly clouded the windows of the masks; and their noses were pinched out of use. And then in quick succession two significant things happened. First, so Tony always remembered, he was cynically demanding of himself whether this was not the rock-bottom of discomfort, and whether he still believed that the thrills and excitements of war transcended its bestiality, and to his own astonishment something instinctive, something in his blood rather than his reason, had cried the answer: “Yes! This is wonderful! Would I be sleeping comfortably in my bed instead of being here? Not I.” And he had just heard this unexpected answer from some hidden and essential self when Harold Wimborne groaned and rolled from his bench to the floor.

They all hurried to his help, and all—this was the second curious memory—impatiently and angrily pulled off their masks that they might be freer to help him. They lifted him on to the table, and Aylwin ran for the M.O.

“I shall be all right. I shall be all right,” mumbled the boy. “Don’t send me down. Don’t send me down.”

And at the same moment the “Gas Clear!” sounded.

The M.O. arrived.

"Don't send me down," begged Childe Harold.

The M.O. did not send Wimborne down. As a matter of fact very little gas had penetrated the galleries, but enough to overthrow the Childe, who was already sick. And the others suffered nothing from having torn off their masks. But they had not foreseen this when they did it.

Thirty hours after, and it is time to go up to the line. The battle is before six in the morning. "Come, tumble out, all you men. Get a move on. Tumble out there."

Is it death?

The night is still the stars'. Forward in single file along the duck-boards, and for God's sake be as quiet as you can. Keep touch. Watch your step, for if you slither off the duck-boards, you may sink above your knees in the mud or be drowned in a shell-hole. Right: push ahead. "Tread thou carefully on the end of the duck-board lest haply the other end arise and smite thee."

Stop that laughing.

Awmighty! what's that? Did yer see that cove lyin' there? He'd gawn black and was covered with vermin—crawlin' with it.

Pooh, pass the oder-kolone, someone.

Probably some poor s—— of a runner shot off the duck-boards as he come back with a message. Whew! get a move on in front there.

Nearer and nearer they go to the quivering lights of the Hun. Looks as tho' we was really going to see the war now.

Where the devil's this 'ere front line? J'ever see such a bloody swamp. Reckon a shell or two must have dropped here. It's damn-all but mud and water everywhere, like the desert at Negilliat, only it's wet instead of dry.

Wish it was the procreatin' old desert, down you?

Not 'arf, mate!

Stop that laughing.

A young officer, yesterday a preparatory schoolmaster, the day before a schoolboy, yesterday a brother of sisters and a husband eloping with Honor—"Honor, are you asleep now?"

—a young officer treads the duck-boards silently, with a hundred men in single file in front of him, and a hundred more behind. And they are silent now, these men. What are they thinking of, he wonders, each in the inescapable loneliness which is himself? God bless them, for good men.

Tony is in a soggy shell-hole with eight of his men. A ditch behind a low breastwork joins it to another hole where are ten more of his men and Sergeant Stott. Behind lies Childe Harold and all his men, in the luxury of a sand-bagged trench. Heaven knows where Scrase has got to, and Moulden. Aylwin is somewhere in the darkness on his right. As for Hughes Anson and A Company, they are far away to the north. To judge from his operation map, the companies ought to be somewhere on the Steenboek River, but who can say? The map is open on Tony's knees, and his head is bowed over it as he tries to study it in the dark. Useless: if he studied it for five hours he would never know where he is; he lost all sense of direction where the duckboards forked. And in this waste of slime how can one identify anything? If one lifts one's eye above the rim of the shell-hole one sees nothing in all the world except mounds and ponds and fens. Unless, indeed, those squarer shapes are the concrete pill-boxes behind the German Lines; and unless, miles and miles away, on the last ridge of all, one's imagination can sketch the spire of Passchendaele.

He has said, "So long, and good luck, Kit," to Scrase, with a shake of the hand; he has taken leave of Joe Wylie, whom he might have brought as orderly, but refrained from doing so because Joe had looked so old to-night; he has heard Hughes Anson's "Well, cheerio, Bungay, and all the best!"; and now he lays down his map to think of these friends. How white was Scrase's face as he gave his crisp orders in Railway Wood! Only once before had he seen a face quite so ashen in its painless misery, and that was the face of an officer on Gallipoli who, under close arrest for unspeakable things, snatched a rifle and shot himself before the night was out.

Poor Scrase! the luck of war had served him ill. Probably in most men of good intellect and subtle, unresting imagination the war was breeding its master obsessions; Scrase had his,

a horror which doubtless he could name no longer, nor describe, but only dread; and Tony had his too, a childish resolve to crush down a slander, two years old and half-forgotten and, in any case, exaggerated by himself beyond all reason. But—he saw it now for the first time—he was as lucky in *his* obsession as Scrase was unlucky. *His* was like an engine already throbbing within him, and waiting to drive him forward, contemptuous of death. Scrase's was like a round-shot shackled to his feet and his wrists. Just the luck of war: his peculiar obsession would probably *make* him; Scrase's would quite possibly destroy him.

It was getting lighter. From far behind the German Line the dawn was marching up, grey on the mist, towards the morass. Soon now! . . . Soon now! . . .

One's wrist-watch is no longer luminous, but one can distinguish the hands. A quarter to five. Dammit! three-quarters of an hour to creep by. Five-thirty is the zero hour.

He looks at the map again to read it in the growing light. He holds it up towards the east and where the enemy is; and he can see a pin-hole shining in it like a star. That pin-hole represents a foolish moment in the listless hours of yesterday, spent dawdling in Railway Wood. He had shut his eyes, swirled the pin round and brought its point down upon the map, saying, "If it punctures the map anywhere in the area of the battle, then that is the spot where I shall drop dead or wounded; if it falls outside, then I shall come through unhurt." It had pricked its hole directly on the Steenbeek River and he had thought, "What a fool I am!"

Only five minutes have gone by. One must do something. He goes to the next shell-hole on a visit to Sergeant Stott, and stays chatting with him and the men; but he catches an infection of nerves from them and is annoyed at the break in his voice which punctuates his speech now and then. It means nothing: he is not afraid. Conversation slackens; and its suspended animation becomes uncomfortable. "Well, I'll see you again later on," he says cheerfully; but before the words could issue he had to swallow with difficulty.

Five o'clock. Perhaps our barrage will begin now. No, there is nothing but the fitful exchange of shell and small-arm fire, which always marks the watch at dawn.

Oh the devil! How leaden are the minutes, and why should

one's knees and hands tremble when one is only excited, not afraid?

"All lost except honour. Business as usual."

This absurd sentence—heard long ago—is drumming in his head. It began in the first few moments of the barrage fire, which stunned them with its suddenness, and is now roaring overhead, beating all coherent thoughts, all fear, all wonder all schemes and all memory out of one's pulsing brain. All coherence lost—so the sentence had begun: "All lost except honour. Business as usual." "All lost except honour. Business as usual." "All lost except—"

The barrage is creeping forward; and a wag cries, "O God help the Boche in his *awful* trouble!"; the morning is lighter. Hell! it's half-past five. A crescendo of machine-gun fire greets the zero hour.

They are out—slipping and sliding and bogged in the mud. Down. . . . Up again. . . . and on—plunging on. "Come on! Come on!" It is Tony's own voice, and it sounds delirious in its excitement. The obsession is on the bridge, praise God. "Come on." Men are falling; but is it the mud or the bullets? One cannot know, for oaths and groans alike are drowned in the uproar of the guns. One fellow who has tumbled—poor simple slow imagination!—is pausing to wipe the muzzle of his rifle clean. "Come on, you fool!" Another is feeling in his hip pocket for a rag, as he stumbles on clumsily. How normal, under the flying roof of thunder, their movements seem! Tony slips again: can he recover his balance? no, he is plunging up to the elbow in the mud.

"Hit, sir?"

"No, Stott; this bloody mud. I'm all right now. Get on. Where in pity's name is this Boche line?"

Hope our direction is right; but we can only go on. Gosh! These shell-holes, hardly different from the swamp around, must be the first German line! Look at the bodies in them! There's only one man alive. Don't shoot him: his hands are up. . . . Too late, poor b——, he's a goner. Is this our objective? But how simple!

"All lost except honour. Business as usual."

Sergeant Stott speaks. "B Company's pushin' ahead, sir."

"Oh well, come on! Guess we shall soon be in Berlin at this rate. It's child's play. Christ! I've stopped one!"

"Bad, sir?"

"No, help me up; only a flesh wound in the arm, I think. You get on; you can't stay and dress it here. I'm coming too."

"Poor Fred Roberts, he's wounded, sir."

"Fred who? Roberts? Oh, can't help that; we must get on."

"All lost except honour. Business as usual."

Machine-gun fire is raking them now, and the German bombardment. Splinters, hissing hot, impinge around them. Men are throwing themselves on their faces. Get up! Get up, you —. Tony seems to be running forward alone. He turns his head and sees Sergeant Stott running after him, and a broken line of others with bayonets lengthening their rifles to disproportionate size—one of them is Willie Sparrow—Ah, stout lads! stout lads! What friends we are in this hour!

He flounders on, and turns his head once more, terror seizing him lest he be alone. The string of men is coming, though with wider gaps than before. Willie Sparrow is out of it. Wounded or dead, who knows? Is that his body huddled on its face? Can't help it. It doesn't seem very important which of the ninepins are skittled over.

"All right, sir. They're throwing up their hands."

A trench is in front—a pukka trench—and a few Germans are emerging above it with rifles laid down and hands up-raised.

"All right, spare 'em. Don't bayonet them."

"Ah!" They are tumbling into the shallow trench, and they become aware of their own breathlessness as they sigh and pant. "One can rest here for a bit."

"Not . . . doing . . . too . . . badly . . . sergeant," pants Tony. "Got here . . . all right."

"Aye, soom of us. T'Company's dropped more'n fifty lads, Ah reckon."

"Can we get in touch with the other companies?"

"But you're wounded, sir."

"Only slightly."

"Got yer first field dressing, sir? Ah'll just be putting it on."

In the pause, while Sergeant Stott rips up his sleeve and dresses the wound, Tony remembers the existence of Scrase and Moulden, Wimborne and Aylwin. And he looks at his watch. It is not yet six o'clock.

Information comes to him of disasters on the right. Aylwin is seriously wounded, and his frustrated men are burrowing into shell-holes, half-way between the jumping-off place and here. As for the 13th Battalion beyond Aylwin (for C Company is the Right Flank Company of the 15th), their left has met with a terrific machine-gun fire—far worse than anything facing the 15th—and they are said to be scattered and leaderless, and retreating towards Railway Wood.

Tony, looking over his breastwork in the grey light of early day, sees out there on the right the square shape of a German pill-box, which is jetting a stream of fire towards the battle area of the 13th. Immediately that mercurial inspiration, which is partly the gift of his obsession, flushes his mind with the certainty that the capture and silencing of this pill-box is the job directly demanded of him, and the key-move for consolidating his own precarious hold, for enabling Aylwin's men to advance, and for effecting contact with those companies of the 13th which are still in being.

"We've got to take that pill-box, dammit!" he hears himself declaring to Sergeant Stott. "Now, by heaven, while their interest is the other way."

Jim Stott pales.

"D'you see, sergeant?"

Tratta-tat . . . tratta-tat-tat-tat . . . spurts the pill-box.

"Aye. Yon pill-box," says Stott, and remembers that he must justify his rank of Sergeant. "Aye, Ah reckon that's the idea, sir. Coom on then, sir. Let's go and have a dekho at it."

"No, you stay here, sergeant, in case—in case someone has to take over the command of the platoon."

"Oh, Ah reckon Ah'll be coomin' along with you, sir."

"No, do what you're told, sergeant."

Tratta-tat . . . tratta-tat-tat-tat . . .

Bombs. It is a job for bombs and a handful of men.

"You, Bray."

"Yes, sir."

"You, Donohoe."

"Yes, sir."

"You, Collins."

"Right, sir."

Their "Yes, sir," wounds the heart. Damn, I'll go alone. . . .

No, I must have those who will follow me up, if I fall. We must bring this business off. It is the job . . . But God be good to them . . . save them.

"All ready? . . . wait for the word."

Back in an Aid Post Padre Quickshaw was working alongside of two doctors of the First Field Ambulance, Captain Sandford and Lieut. Clifton.

Quickshaw was up here in the Aid Post against orders. There had been the customary wrangle between the Brigadier and himself as to his proper post during a battle. The Brigadier, supported by the Brigade Major and the Staff Captain, had firmly asseverated that his place was down at the Ypres Convent, where there would be dying men to minister to, and dead to bury. In the underground tunnels of Railway Wood, where, God help 'em, the accommodation was tight enough without the addition of padres, pray, where would he put himself if he went there? No, padre, be reasonable for once, and get thee to the nunnery.

To all of this Quickshaw had retorted with the indignant assertion that his duty was to the living, not to the dead; and he left the presence of the Brigadier, the Brigade Major, and the Staff Captain. Such was his irritation he went straight up the Menin Road through the daylight, and ducked along the broken railway embankment till he reached the doorways of Railway Wood. Down one of the shafts he went, and along a tunnel to the door of the 15th Battalion headquarters. Peeping in here, he was glad to see Colonel Tappiter sitting alone at the table.

"The padre, hello!" Colonel Tappiter greeted him. "What's for you, padre? What have I done wrong?"

"Look here, sir." Quickshaw, entering, came straight to the point. "I don't want to sound highfalutin, or any balderdash like that, but if you'll let me, I want to go over the top with the 15th to-morrow."

The Colonel stared.

"*What!* Hell, no, padre! Don't talk like a damned fool."

"I never do, sir," grinned Quickshaw.

"You're doing it now. As a non-combatant you mustn't lead an attack—it's against some Geneva convention or other

—and you mustn't even carry arms, so what the devil would be the use of you ? ”

“ None whatever, as far as I can see,” answered Quickshaw promptly, “ but—er—the use comes afterwards, sir.”

“ Hum.” The Colonel perceived his meaning. “ But probably there'd be no ‘ afterwards.’ ”

Quickshaw averted his eyes : he so disliked what he was going to say because it might sound heroic. But, jerking his head angrily, he spat it out.

“ Dead or alive, sir, the use would be there.”

The Colonel was touched.

“ You're a good fellow, padre ; but no, you mustn't go. To put it bluntly, all the stretchers are wanted for combatants.”

“ But, sir ”—Quickshaw, reverting to chaff, could face the Colonel again—“ you are always telling us about Father Flinn of the Dublins who rushed out of the *River Clyde* and led them on to V Beach. After dinner sometimes you've been astonishingly fruity about it.”

This was indeed a trap for the Colonel, and he escaped from it none too well, floundering out on a couple of jests. “ Ah, but he was an R.C., old Padre. R.C.s are naturally picturesque, but not C. of E.s—no, Quickshaw, no—not C. of E.s. Besides, Irishmen follow their priests everywhere ; Englishmen don't, thank the Lord.”

“ Damnably true,” said Quickshaw.

“ Our men simply wouldn't understand what you were after ; they'd say it was swank.”

Quickshaw thought a bit, and his glance fled away again. “ As it works out in the army, sir,” he said, “ it's better for a padre to be accused of swank than of funk.”

The Colonel touched his shoulder in a kindly way. “ Nobody's ever accused you of funk, Quickshaw ; so that's your last excuse gone. No, you go off somewhere, and look after the dead and the dying.”

“ Oh *damn* the dead and the dying ! ” said Padre Quickshaw.

He left the Colonel and climbed a stairway to the Advanced Dressing Station of the First Field Ambulance, which was a bomb-proof dug-out on the ground level. To the officers here he offered himself as an extra orderly, and, being accepted, without further ado attached himself to them for rations and discipline. On the morning of the battle he went up with Captain Sandford and Lieut. Clifton to the Aid Post.

This Aid Post was in and about a derelict pill-box, on whose concrete walls and roof enormous red crosses were painted. Duck-boards coming in from the swamps ran to its entrance through an earth-walled ditch, and away again over the sodden ground to the Advanced Dressing Station at Railway Wood, where they met the comparative decency of Cambridge Road. Down the duck-boards, all these early hours, came an unbroken train of stretchers ; moving quickly sometimes, and sometimes slowly, when there was congestion in front ; and at other times waiting—waiting—while the blood soaked through their canvas and dripped to the earth.

“The whole of the 15th Royal West Essex seem to be coming down,” grumbled Quickshaw.

A battalion which had marched up on its feet two hours before, was coming down now on its backs. In the Aid Post the two doctors and the padre did what they could for the wounded men, before sending them on to Railway Wood, where they would be tended again and transferred to the Potijze Road and the waiting motor ambulances. Aylwin came down among the other stretcher cases, and Childe Harold, both dying ; and Willie Sparrow and Art Webster and Fred Roberts, and hundreds more whose laughing voices have been heard in this history, but not their names.

They sounded every note in the gamut of pain ; from the agony which could gasp no words, but thrust out the eye-balls instead, to a resignation which bade the mouth grin and joke, under eyebrows now frowning, now lifting. One of them, a boy not nineteen years old, was as terrible a sight as any Quickshaw had seen. His skin was not broken anywhere, and he was no more than a “Walking Case” led by a friend. But the shock of a shell, which had exploded near him killing all the others in his hole, had changed the shape of his body as one might change the shape of a clay statuette by striking downwards upon its head : his head had sunk into his neck, and his chest protruded like a hunchback’s ; one shoulder had gone down to the level of his ribs, and the other up to his ear ; his face, twisted to one side, was as staring and imbecile as a cretin’s. And yet he was only a walking case—not a scratch anywhere, said the doctor, and not a bone broken.

“Pull yourself together !” Sandford shouted at him. “Pull yourself together !” but the boy apparently heard nothing, or heard only sounds of a voice miles away.

Sandford put his lips to the boy's ear: "Pull yourself together, you little idiot;" and he shook him brutally.

But still the boy only stared.

Then Sandford, to the amazement of all, slapped his patient violently on the cheeks, first with one hand and then with the other. The boy quivered under the impacts, but nothing more.

"Stand back, you fools—get back, can't you," ordered Sandford irritably; and as the men around retreated a pace, he clenched his fist, and swinging it round, caught the boy a sledge-hammer blow on the ear. The boy tottered, and an orderly caught him and stood him erect again: he was still only staring agape, like a half-wit.

"Useless. . . . Useless," Sandford sighed. "Take him away . . . poor kid."

Childe Harold came down with his face raked by splinters, his eyes blinded, and his breathing rasped by gas. He had no laughter now; he was too frightened for his eyes. "Tell me that I shall see again," he asked repeatedly. "Oh, tell me that I shall see again." He asked it of Clifton, of Sandford, of Quickshaw, and of the orderly.

"Oh that'll be all right," Sandford reassured him; but before the sightless face he was able to look at the others and convey, by a despairing shake of the head, that the boy was dying. "Keep your pecker up, old man. It's only temporary."

"Oh good!" rasped Harold. "Good. I'm glad of that. I just wanted to feel certain that I should see again."

Fred Roberts was one of those who grinned. This man, whose sour grumbling, persistent as the burble of the stream, had entertained the battalion for three years; who had grumbled on the march and in the billet at the end of the march—grumbled when ordered to go forward and fight, and grumbled when denied that privilege—this man, now lying on his stretcher with a chunk of shell in his thigh, only grinned his recognition at Quickshaw and made him a joke.

"This is the third I've stopped, sir. I stopped me first on December the nineteenth at Helles, and me second on June the seventeenth at Haverincourt, and here is me third. I got the two other chunks. The M.O.s give 'em to me and I give 'em to the missus to put on the mantelpiece. I'm glad I got me third, sir. I'm going to 'ave 'em painted red, white and blue and stuck in a glass case."

"I hope it will be your last, old man," said Quickshaw. "Three's enough."

"Oh, it'll be me last all right, sir. We fairly got 'em on the run up there. Our boys are doing prime. I reckon it'll be over by Christmas."

"*You* seem all right," said the doctor cheerily while he glanced at the wound. "Feeling perky enough, are you?"

"Never better, sir—*wurl*, *that's* a bit of a lie, but I'm all right. I don't reckon much to that little chunk. Got used to them by this time. It's me third."

"Splendid. Well, we'll leave them to get it out for you at Railway Wood."

"Joo think they'll give it me, sir?"

"Oh, yes, they'll give it you all right if you ask them."

"I'll say you said they was to, shell I?"

"If you like."

"Thank you, sir."

"Right-ho, my man. Good luck to you."

"Good luck to *you*, sir."

The stretcher-bearers lifted him up.

"Good-bye, Mr. Quickshaw."

"Good-bye, Fred, old man."

"*You'll* be coming soon, sir. It'll be over by Christmas."

And Fred Roberts was gone.

All this was before the Left Companies of the 13th broke and retreated in disorder. But now they were retreating right on to the Aid Post, and the doctors, becoming alarmed for its safety, discussed a withdrawal to the Advanced Dressing Station at Railway Wood.

"Damn, no," said Quickshaw. "Why the devil are these men coming back? Can't someone reorganize them?"

"They've no officers left," said Sandford, who had been out to survey the situation.

"But they're messing up everything," grumbled Quickshaw.

"Granted," said Sandford.

"But what are they doing out there?"

"Mostly sitting in old shell-holes, and waiting for someone to bring them fags."

"Take 'em some playing cards," suggested Clifton.

"They've got sergeants and corporals, haven't they?" asked Quickshaw.

"I dunno." Sandford shrugged his shoulders. "It looks like demoralization."

"But dammit: we shall probably find the Aid Post behind the German Line instead of in front of it!"

"Exactly, padre."

"I'll go out and see what can be done. You get on with the bandaging. You do it better than me."

He went out, found a sergeant, and, after spluttering some of his resentment into his rather bewildered face, ordered him to collect all the other N.C.O.s he could find, and bring them into the lee of the Aid Post. To these he explained irritably that their disorderly withdrawal had endangered the Aid Post, and the M.O.s couldn't get on with their bandaging properly. He asked them where all their men could be got together again in comparative safety and reorganized. A sergeant suggested some old trenches and shell-holes near Wynbek Farm. "Well, bloody well go and do it," said Quickshaw, "and we'll get 'em back." The men were assembled, and Quickshaw, without listening to their grumbling, inquired of the sergeants what was the correct way for such a parade to advance to the battle, and what were the correct words of command. The sergeants providing these words, he shouted them, and led the men back along the duck-boards till they were out again in the exposed places, where he collected them in shell-holes, till he was sufficiently acquainted with the method of advancing in extended order, with bayonets fixed.

"But it's that there pill-box," objected a sergeant, pointing to the pill-box which had been the objective of Tony's raid. "It was that one as did us all in before."

"Can't help that," said Quickshaw. "Pass the word they're all to advance when they see me advancing."

Two minutes later Quickshaw, with a fine wave of men behind him in extended order and bayonets fixed, was running across the open, one eye, it must be allowed, turning anxiously towards the pill-box.

It spoke not at all: it seemed as if dead. Only some distant German guns opened on them, and the shells burst wrathfully before and behind their advance, and the splinters hissed their repudiation. A few men fell, but Quickshaw went on.

He led the men right back into the battle and handed them over to a subaltern of the 13th, who was never more surprised

in his life than when he recognized the Senior Chaplain of the Division as the leader of this dashing recovery. There was little time for congratulation, however, for the movement had been seen by the enemy, and five-nines began to crash about them, gouging up showers of mud and hurling their reek upon the air. Quickshaw, who had no more use for "crumps" than anyone else, having finished his task, ran incontinently back, floundering and slipping among the shell-holes, and quite indifferent to whether the men laughed at his "wind up" or heard his frequent detonations of irritability. He returned unhurt to the Aid Post, where he got on with his bandaging.

The pill-box had not spoken all the time. It had been a job for bombs. "All ready?" Tony had inquired of his handful of men. "Then come quick."

They were out. Tony knew not whether excitement was pounding at his heart or whether all emotional response had been deadened within him: both states seemed to be his in that crouching run from the trench's lip to the square shoulder of the pill-box. How was it possible that he was not seen? If they turned their jet of fire this way, he and all his party were dead men. The ground was kind to him; he did not slip much; perhaps he was picking his way with the instinctive delicacy of a somnambulist. But now they are seen! The fire is at them point-blank. One and another pitch with a groan, or, more awful, with a silence. He alone seems unable to be hit. A blind rush, and he is behind the concrete flank of the pill-box. His heart pounds with terror now. Behind the pill-box, on its German face, there is a low orifice, not higher than the mouth of a large kennel, and it leads, as he knows from scores of other such strong-points, into a square cell measuring perhaps eight feet every way. In the fraction of a minute before he throws his bomb he sees faces—awful faces, never to be forgotten in this life—the white faces, transfixed with horror, of four or five Germans. One acute stab of pity for them shoots like a pain through his thinking; one second's debate, since their hands are up. "Should he risk a parley with them—but that might mean failure. For all he knows he is alone, and the rest of his party dead. No, he must succeed. This is the chance for which he has waited for

years"—and as he thinks this, he sees Moulden talking to Aylwin and Childe Harold in their tent at Pelusium—"What with O'Grogan's unfortunate reputation——" *Damn, no!* the bomb pitches into that grey chamber.

He leaps aside, screaming "Look out!" to a man who is near. There is a loud explosion, and a fissure flashes like black lightning in the concrete side of the pill-box; his imagination instantly pictures that interior as it is now; and the picture rushes up to the captaincy of his mind, displacing the obsession for ever; and with it, his stomach seems to rush up into his mouth, and he is sicker than a poisoned dog.

The pill-box is silent.

"Occupy it, occupy it," he hears himself moaning—moaning like a dying child—as he lies, face forward, and retches again. "I can't go in. . . . No, *no*, I *won't*!—I can't. . . . Sergeant Stott. Fetch Sergeant Stott," he mutters.

CHAPTER VII

PASSCHENDAELE III

THAT moment, when Tony fell from a pole of excitement, and down through a sickness, on to a deadness of all emotion, a paralysis of will, a kind of shell-shock in which a blast of imagination had been the shell-burst—that moment he passed from being one man to being another; he changed from a boy rather bewildered at his exultation in war into a man dumbfounded by a blinding vision of its reality. When emotions began to fashion themselves into patterns again, he knew that all such childish things as a vindictiveness against Moulden, or a nursing of his wounded pride, or a desire that a few simple-minded companions should speak well of him, had died out of his mind, together with all vindictiveness against his country's enemies, even when they sinned; he seemed to stand detached from all passions in a loneliness of love and pity and pardon for all the world. As with a man who was selfish once but has been refined by long months in a sick bed, this attitude rested on a mental sickness which asked only stillness and silence and an empty peace; whose inarticulate voice was shaping the words, "Let me go. . . . Let me go away from this for ever. . . . Oh, let me go, and leave me alone."

Later he remembered Scrase and knew that he had experienced exactly what his friend had experienced two years before; he understood it now, and marvelled that Scrase could have carried on through all these succeeding months. Whether *he* would be able to carry on, and what would happen when he was asked to lead another attack he could not think, nor for the present did he trouble to wonder.

For his safety they dragged him into the pill-box, and he saw his handiwork. The sickness moved again, and his breath was short.

They were all speaking his praises and pressing his hand;

and Sergeant Stott was so moved with admiration as to be wet about the eyes.

Not yet half-past six, but the battle for that day was over. Its remaining events never outlined themselves clearly in his recollection; eleven out of its twelve hours seemed to have been spent in idle waiting in the pill-box. Some time at dark the companies were "pulled out"; and they filed back along the duck-boards to Railway Wood. Here there was the reunion of such of them as would meet again. No Aylwin, no Childe Harold; no batman for Moulden, Art Webster being an absentee; but Scrase was there, wounded in the hand, and Moulden, and Hughes Anson. The battalion which had gone into the battle nearly seven hundred strong numbered less than three hundred effectives now. Tony first met Moulden in one of the underground cells; and Moulden immediately came up to him with an outstretched hand.

"Congratulations!" he said. "I hear you've done wonders. No one's able to talk of anything else."

"Thanks," acknowledged Tony; and though he was grateful to Moulden for this exhibition of good sportsmanship, he knew, somehow, that it *was* an exhibition, unrelated to the man's true feelings; he sensed that Moulden, after much deliberation, had decided that this was the most impressive attitude to adopt, and, having fallen in love with it as a fine attitude, was trying his best to make it sincere, but without much success.

"I hope you get something jolly good out of it. A—a"—he had certainly been going to say "a V.C.," but the jealousy which was his true feeling resolutely refused an exit to the words—"a D.S.O. at least."

"Thanks, old man," said Tony; and didn't add that to-night he seemed to have crossed a bridge and gone miles away from such a curious emotion as hunger for the praise of men and their awards.

Then Hughes Anson burst in, shouting, "Well, how many of you lads are left? I hear Aylwin's got his packet; and Childe Harold, poor kid. Poor old Aylwin doesn't realize that he's finished, and he's giving detailed information of the battle to everyone he meets. Well, Bungay, you're the little hero of the day. My aunt! Going forward in the face of a heavy fire——"

"Precious little fire till the last second," corrected Tony.

"Oh, you shut your mug, and don't be the modest little hero. Going forward, as I say, long after you were wounded and in the face of a heavy fire—or in the earnest expectation of it, if you like—and capturing a whole hornet's nest of Boches practically single-handed, and slaughtering them all——"

"Oh, shut up," pleaded Tony, turning his face away.

"And slaughtering them all, and saving the whole bloody front, because it was that pill-box which had held up the advance—my aunt! (as I said before), its gallantry was only surpassed by its genius. It's a corking story, Bungay. It's epic, and I wish I had the wording of the recommendation to a V.C. I'd get it for you."

"*Are* they recommending him?" inquired Moulden—and there was anxiety in his voice.

"Well, if they aren't doing so, they ought to be."

"Of course," agreed Moulden, and the effort was a credit to him.

Hughes' voice dropped:

"Heard the yarn about Scrase?"

"No—what?"

But as he spoke Scrase entered. How ill he looked! The two-days' beard on his chin made whiter his white face, and deeper the lines across his brow and darker the shadows round his hollow eyes. A dirty blood-stained bandage wrapped about his right hand completed this picture of sickness. And about his manner there was something perturbing; a flushed, unreal gaiety, a noisy chattiness, that belied the restless wandering in his eyes and the breath-caught halt in his speech. And he had hardly stayed for five minutes talking thus feverishly to them, and explaining in unnecessary detail how a machine-gun bullet had scratched his knuckles, before his restlessness drove him out again. Hughes went to the door and looked along the dimly-lit gallery to make sure that he had gone from hearing. Then he returned and, with a significant look at Moulden and Tony, asked: "Did you see that hand of his?"

"Yes."

"What do you make of it?"

"I don't get your meaning, Rosy," said Tony.

Even Hughes the ruthless could not bring himself easily to tell the story. For once his eyes, seldom averted by diffidence from their steady gaze, sought the side wall of the little cell with its tapestry of sacking.

"One doesn't like to think it of poor old Scrase," he murmured.

"To think what?" Moulden was keenly interested now.

"He bandaged that hand himself and refused at first to let the doctor see it. Said it was nothing much; just a scratch along the knuckles."

"What are you getting at?" demanded Tony.

"The doc. insisted that it must be properly attended to, and when he saw it—well—he says the wound was never made by a machine-gun bullet, but by a revolver fired at close quarters. He declares that Scrase was over-anxious in his denial and swore black and blue it was a machine-gun bullet. The doc. didn't continue the argument, and of course he's playing the game and keeping mum about it, but the orderlies overheard, and"—Hughes shrugged his shoulders—"you can guess they'll soon be discussing it with C Company's men."

"Do you mean it's an S.I.?" asked Tony, dismay lowering his voice to a whisper. These letters, signifying "Self Inflicted," were branding letters, only to be uttered in a whisper.

"Yepp!" nodded Hughes with forced cheerfulness. "'Fraid so. And damn badly done too. The lad must be in a rotten state."

"Oh Christ!" Tony muttered, while Moulden looked too scared to speak at all. "Has the Colonel heard anything about it?"

"I think he's trying not to," laughed Hughes, mirthlessly. "It's too bloody awful in an officer."

"Can there be any doubt about it?"

"The doc. says not."

And now the restless Scrase returned, still wearing his uneasy rôles of talkativeness and gaiety. He announced that after three days' rest in Railway Wood they were probably going back to the line to attack again. "Isn't that fine? We're going back for two reasons: because we've suffered less than the other battalions, and because we're reckoned the best crowd of all. Did you know that? The old 15th are considered to be the lads. We're the Shock Troops of the brigade. How does that suit you? I hope you're satisfied."

"Oh, delighted, delighted!" Hughes assured him, instantly shedding his grimness of the minute before and donning his facetiousness of every day. "That means we've got three more whole days to live."

Moulden copied him.

"*I don't mind,*" he said. "If we're not killed in three days' time, we shall be in three months, so what's there *to it?*"

"Quite," agreed the merry Hughes. "Absolutely."

"Quickshaw and Tono are the heroes of the hour," said Scrase, swinging off to another subject. "Brigade's recommending both for the D.S.O."

"Cheers!" exclaimed Hughes. "But why stop at the D.S.O.? What's wrong with the V.C. for old Bungay?"

And Moulden, satisfied that it was *not* the V.C., came out strong. "Rather! Why, it was the chance of a life-time to get a V.C. for the battalion."

"Quite," repeated Hughes. "Absolutely. And what you must do, Bungay, is this: now that you've got your D.S.O. you must work your ticket home. See? Do a guy. Yes, you 'op it, while the 'opping's good."

Tony produced a laugh. "Which is precisely what *you* did, isn't it, old man, when you got your M.C. nearly two years ago. Went straight home and withdrew from active hostility against the enemy, didn't you?"

"Oh, *me?*" Hughes said this as if he came in a different category altogether. "Oh, but you see, *I* enjoy it. My crikeys, I wouldn't miss a minute of it! No, I've no complaints. To the end of my life I shall always say it was a good war."

As they spoke Scrase had been turning from one to the other with the unintelligent stare of a man whose thoughts were roaming elsewhere. It was plain that he had hardly heard any of this, because he picked up the conversation at the point where he had left it.

"Ah, but you see old Tappiter doesn't recommend anyone for distinctions easily," he reminded them. "He thinks that what we do is no more than our duty——"

"Which is rot," said Hughes.

"And I don't believe he'd have forwarded Tono's recommendation to Brigade if he hadn't felt——" Scrase truncated the sentence, and took refuge in a cough.

"If he hadn't felt *what?*" asked Tony; while Moulden looked uncomfortable.

"If he hadn't felt that the case was exceptional," Scrase parried.

And during those three days of waiting Tony heard everywhere a like enthusiasm for his action. All those English public-school boys, who, copying one another like sheep, had traduced him behind his back, now executed an about-turn and followed their leaders into the last extravagances of praise. He perceived this movement very clearly, though it went on behind his back. He saw how the mutterings of detraction, which previously they had indulged, now served as additional fuel for raising high the flame of praise: to their romantic minds the story that O'Grogan had made good in glorious fashion after a failure on Gallipoli was a story not to be spoilt in the telling, with the result that they exaggerated his deed far beyond its worth.

In these later years of the war the recommendations for gallantry did not have to worm their way back to London through long days of travel, but were sent only a little way back—to Corps or to Army—and their acceptance or rejection was known in a few days. Before the 15th went back into the battle of Passchendaele it knew that Lieut. O'Grogan could put D.S.O. after his name. But of Quickshaw's recommendation it heard nothing, and throughout the battalion and throughout the whole brigade there were murmurings about a mutiny should it be denied him. Romantics all, they were as generous in their acclamations as they were ready with their censures, and as stubborn in the one as in the other. The padre must have his D.S.O. Of course. Good old padre! Hadn't he left his bandages to rally a retreating force and lead 'em in a dashing attack; hadn't he, padre though he was, saved the whole line by retaking an abandoned position; hadn't he, as you might say, saved the situation at a crucial moment and, for all they knew, won the war? Rather! and either you have your D.S.O., padre dear, or we go on strike.

They could not know what was happening to Quickshaw's recommendation. But it was enjoying an adventure of its own. Brigade had written a true account of the padre's "gallant action on the morning of October the —th" and the little slips of paper went to Division, where, no doubt, it was ended, or and from Division to Corps. It returned to Brigade immediately with the indignant retort that this officer, so far from being recommended for a distinction, should be at once recommended for a Court-Martial, his action being an offence against international law, inasmuch as he, a non-combatant officer, had

taken an active part in an assault upon the enemy. But, attached to this reply, was a smaller slip of paper on which the hand of a High General himself had pencilled :

“ 1./Suggest that these papers be ‘ destroyed by gun-fire ’ and the recommendation be worded differently ; ”

and after this, the hand of Division had written solemnly :

“ 2./Passed for your information and action please.”

Brigade took action. The Staff Captain ceremonially shot the papers with his revolver in the meadow outside his tent ; and the Brigadier, the Brigade Major and the Staff Captain, after enjoying this ceremony, went indoors and spent an enchanting evening composing a description of Padre Quickshaw’s “ devotion to duty in his ministration to the wounded (and his refusal to desert them) on the morning of October the —th.” They scratched their heads over this word and that, seeking always the most eloquent, and sometimes even demanding of the padre how such and such a word was spelt, while Quickshaw himself fumed about the room and spat abuse at their unheeding heads, but was not unhappy, one thinks. The revised recommendation was forwarded on a Wednesday ; and on Friday a G.R.O. announced that the Distinguished Service Order had been awarded to the Rev. T. Quickshaw, Temporary Chaplain to the Forces (3rd class), for his devotion to duty in his unwearying ministration to the wounded.

The laughter of a whole Brigade was not louder than its cheers.

The Brigade laughed ? Not all, for this was after the third day and their return to the battle. And one of its battalions hardly existed any more. The 15th Royal West Essex was slain. Before the third night paled towards morning, they had gone back along the duck-board, three hundred strong ; and they did not see the noon. Only five of their officers and sixty of their “ Other Ranks ” trod the duck-boards coming home.

Tony had not gone with them. His good luck was watching

over him as surely as ill luck was dogging the heels of his friend. His right arm, though its wound was not severe and needed no more tending than an inoculation against tetanus and a daily dressing, had become stiff and painful; and the doctor, while permitting him to remain with the battalion, forbade him all use of it for a few more days. Tony was not sorry; nay, he felt like a man temporarily reprieved, for he had been racked with doubts and fears of himself, and, as for heroics, they only sickened him now. So, at three o'clock of the morning he had stood by a door-post of Railway Wood and watched the men file out into the darkness.

Hughes Anson passed first with A Company. He and his men were bright and cheerful, for Rosy had just committed his last unmorality. Perceiving the exhaustion of his men, and resolved that "my company's going to do best in this show. Don't they always, Bungay?" he had most deliberately stolen the jars of rum that belonged to the section of miners in charge of Railway Wood. For some days past he had rested a concupiscent eye on these lovely earthenware jars, where they sat hidden in the cell of the young O.C. Miners; and this night, while their guardian slept, he had burgled the cell on tiptoe and left his note-of-hand behind him: "So sorry, old bird, but our need is greater than thine." Then he had gone among his men, and poured out for them the most generous rum ration ever issued in the British army; and they had pledged his health and long life, and he theirs. Hughes Anson was a sinner, undoubtedly, but never was an officer more loved by his men. And as he passed now towards the darkness, Tony waved "Cheerio" to him, and Rosy waved back, and his last words were, "You can sell all my gadgets for the benefit of the mess. I always think that's the best thing to do with Deceased Officers' Kit, don't you?"

Then Scrase went by with C Company, and Tony pressed forward to shake his hand. And soon after came Moulden, and Tony shook his hand, too, and said, "All the best, old thing." Strange how completely his bitterness against this man was dead in him!

For Scrase his heart was heavy, as he turned back into the tunnelled quiet of Railway Wood. That tortured spirit who would not speak his pain, how one had suffered with him in the last three days! One had been compelled to meet his silence with the answering silence of a friend; but it had been

misery—no less—to see that intellect, which was once so fine and humorous, busying itself with the tricks of a sham happiness, and a sham impatience to be fighting again, that it might cover up the pitiable evidence of that wounded hand.

Or had the impatience, perhaps, been real? Was Kit eager and trembling to get back into the fight that he might rebuild a reputation which his madness had overthrown? Was it *he* who had insisted on going back in spite of his damaged right hand; or was it Colonel Tappiter who had sent him? The Colonel had said (so the officers knew): "That little wound needn't prevent you directing your men. It may even impress them; and I want every good officer I can scrape together;" but Kit, returning from the C.O., had been careful to hint that it was only after loud insistence on his part that old Tappiter had permitted him to return to the battle. Poor Kit. If ever a man loved his friend, Tony loved Scrase in the hour of his collapse. So much so that now, sitting in the underground cell which had been C Company's headquarters, he fell to praying for Scrase, though the habit of prayer had long since fallen from him. "O God help him. . . . O God, help him. . . . O God, make it all right for him." Once before surely, and very long ago, these same petitions had broken from him, for his own relief. When was it? Ah, he remembered. It was when they had told him, a boy of sixteen, that his father had deserted the family, and disgraced them all, and the story had stirred no anger in him, but only the intolerably vivid picture of his father's suffering. "O God, help him. . . . O God, help Kit. . . . O God, make it all right for him."

A noise of wrathful guns stayed this automatic prayer. It couldn't be the preliminary bombardment—not yet. The time? Only 3.30. Hastening up the nearest stairway to the surface of the world, he arrived at a door which looked over the moonlit wastes towards the jagged pattern of Ypres. From a dozen points behind that panorama of shadows the beams of searchlights were sweeping the night sky with its drifts of cloud, and wheeling and crossing one another in a slow and stately measure, as they sought for the threat that sped, humming, across the darkness. The throb of that enemy aeroplane was plainly heard—a steady cyphering note among the explosions of the bombs and the bursts of anti-aircraft shells. And even as he watched, one of the spokes of light rested tremblingly

on a chosen spot, and lo! there in the very crest and spread of its beam a golden dragon-fly vibrated on luminous wings; and all the other searchlights, perceiving that the enemy had been trapped at last, wheeled their shafts round, with the same unhurrying dignity, till they all converged on that one tiny glittering insect, as it dipped and pitched and twisted in a frantic effort to escape. But if it dipped, they dipped too; and if it swerved, they moved with it—slow, unhurrying, confident. And then the tracer bullets shot up the shafts of light and made a ruled line of luminous dots within the powdery brilliance of the beams, for these bullets were lamps. There was a roar of other aeroplanes climbing to meet the enemy—but they would not reach him. He was heading fast for home, and if he eluded the bullets and the shrapnel, he would carry his fluttering heart into the safety of the German skies. He defeated them; he passed out of the searchlights' reach, and his escape was almost a relief. One by one the searchlights veered back; and the night was quiet again.

Tony walked to the top of the hump which was Railway Wood. He was troubled because the beauty of the spectacle just concluded had filled him with delight, notwithstanding all that had happened in the last days. When would he solve the problem of the dilemma in his nature between his rational hatred of war and his emotional exultation in it? Never, probably. Until that moment by the pill-box when reason had leapt to the throne and expelled all elation, he had *enjoyed* the war! Explain *that*, who could! And there was still—even now—a part of him which drew a keen enjoyment from the war before his eyes. He was persuaded that he was not in essence different from most men, only more aware of his emotions and more introspective, and yet beyond denial he could experience an intense delight in the Fact of War. And he could see that this pleasure was something different from a mere youthful thrill in war's excitements; something different from a keen delight in the fine and lovely deeds that war enabled men to perform; it was—as he could only repeat again and again—a deep appreciation of the beauty of the Fact of War. Why, look: as he stood here on this higher ground and saw the vast wilderness of the Salient outspread before him, with all its harrowed mud-scape glistening beneath the moonlight—the ringed water in its shell-holes, and the long melancholy tarns reflecting the sky—and never anywhere

a sign of life, but, all around, an horizon just luminous with morning, why, he was ready to swear that it was at once as terrible and as beautiful a thing as he had seen, or would ever see. Perhaps, as sometimes he had suggested to Kit, Beauty had nothing to do with human pains and human values, but wherever there was perfection, it was there; and this was the perfection of desolation. It *must* be beautiful, or why should he be feeling now that he would give his soul to be able to capture it for ever on a painter's canvas or in a poet's words. Why should he be wanting to possess it in some form for ever?

A few shells flew overhead and burst on the German line. Doubtless the guns were ranging before the barrage opened. 4.30. What were Scrase and the others feeling now? O God, help them. . . . O God, help them. . . .

It was cold, bitterly cold; and he had rushed up to watch the air raid without his British Warm. He returned to Railway Wood, and lay down on the table in the empty headquarters of C Company. Soon he was asleep, though half-aware in his dreams of the world palpitating overhead with barrage and counter-barrage.

When he awoke it was eight in the morning, and he heard that the battalion was wiped out: Hughes Anson was dead, Moulden was dead, Sergeant Stott was wounded and dying, and Scrase under close arrest for cowardice in the face of the enemy.

CHAPTER VIII

THE DEBRIS I

TONY walked along the road, westward from Proven. He was going to find Quickshaw. Tony was the officer "responsible" for Captain Scrase and must not, in the ordinary way, quit the prisoner's side, but he had been granted at his earnest request an afternoon's relief, and another officer had taken over his watch in the room at Proven. He had found it intolerable sitting in a room with Kit, while the hours passed and the chances and the hopes. He had fretted to be outside, setting forces to work to save his friend.

The whole of his thought, in these hours, was bent towards the saving of Kit. Kit with a firing party in front of him and a wall behind—no, *no*; not that! But what could he do; to whom could he turn? He was an infantry subaltern, which meant that his friends had all been brother officers in his own battalion, and now these men were dead—or dying. Colonel Tappiter was still there, but the Colonel was chafed and haggard just now, and very rude and unapproachable. All of the old batmen too—all were gone; except Joe Wylie. Tony could think of one friend only—Padre Quickshaw—and, though he could not see that the padre had any power at all to influence the forces moving to the destruction of Kit, he was hurrying towards him—because he had no one else to hurry to.

He found Quickshaw at No. 201 Stationary Hospital, where he was resident for a few days, not as a patient, but as a chaplain. But he looked ill enough to be a patient, thought Tony. This was the first time in the two and a half years of their acquaintance that Quickshaw had looked really ill. A small worn figure, with worried face and thinning hair, he had always been; but now an utter exhaustion seemed to have shrunk him into something still smaller and more worn. All knew that for the last fortnight Quickshaw had slept perhaps

six times, and then for no more than a spell of two hours : every night he had been in the dressing stations and every day he had spent writing the letters and attending to the business of the hundreds of men for whom he had promised to act as executor. It was at Railway Wood that the brigade added to its everlasting jest, "I'm going to be a padre in the next war," the rider, "Yes, but not a Quickshaw, dammit."

Tony was so shocked at his drained, depleted look, that he remarked on it before anything else.

"You look as though you ought to go sick yourself," he said ; a suggestion which Quickshaw repudiated with a word that may not be told.

Quickshaw answered little to the tale which Tony related. He had not heard it before ; because the 15th were holding tight to it, and so were Brigade and Division ; and Quickshaw had not been near Brigade since the battalions were withdrawn from the battle and sent to "rest" in the fields and farms around Proven : he had preferred to "stand by" those men of the Royal West Essex who were lying in this hospital. And now when he heard it he said little ; only his fish-like eyes came further than usual out of his head, and his lips emitted an oath ; and presently he added the reflection (which didn't seem very sensible) that it made him want to tear off the ribbons of his M.C. and D.S.O. and throw them away. Not a word of condolence could he produce for his visitor, nor did he extend towards him the hand of a friend. It was an odd kind of sympathy, but it was very satisfying to Tony.

After a long embarrassed silence his first words were, "There are a hell of a lot of Canadians in this hospital."

"Are there?" said Tony.

"Yes : they seem to have been doing big things up yonder. I'm beginning to think they're some of the best troops we've got."

"Are they?" said Tony.

"Yes. . . . I don't suppose they're any braver than the Australians, but they haven't the bounce of that lot—they haven't the 'We're-the-only-boys-who-can-fight-and-you-Imperial-lads-are-too-gentle-by-far' sort of thing. I've not much use for that brand of bunk."

"Of course not," Tony agreed. "But only a few of them talk like that."

"Perhaps . . . Yes. . . . There are a lot of Canadians in this hospital, and they're some of the best we've got," mused Quickshaw.

The thought passed through Tony that they must indeed have been good to earn a superlative from Quickshaw.

"He'll die," continued Quickshaw.

"What?"

"He'll die. I'm afraid you must resign yourself to it."

"Oh no, he can't—he mustn't—we——"

"But he will. The case'll pass from the hands of those who knew and understood him into the hands of a lot of mechanical-minded old legalists—God! haven't I seen it before?"

"But Tappiter'll send up a tribute to his character, and so will Brigade."

"Paw! do you suppose there's been one in a hundred court-martials when the C.O. hasn't said the best he could for the prisoner? And yet they've shot two hundred men so far. How can they spare an officer? Their very sense of fair play won't let them do it. Yes, it's their very virtues that'll kill him. . . ."

Tony was silent, for his heart had sickened: if a heart can feel white, his heart was white then.

"Why, the Brigadier was blowing off the other day," proceeded Quickshaw, "because a strict order had been issued that if any officer gave the word to retire, his brother officers were to shoot him. I said, 'Right-ho, General. I'll remember that order, and as soon as you give the word to your brigade to retire—as you'll have to do before the Germans have finished with you—I'll shoot;' and when I said that, the dull-witted old ass seemed to see the reality of the matter for the first time. Scrase let his men go over the top without him—No, I wouldn't give a thank-you for his chances."

"But you'll do all you can for him, won't you?"

"Of course," spurted Quickshaw. "What do you suppose?"

"Thanks. . . ."

The subject, as was best, went aside and out of view.

"I suppose you know," began Quickshaw, his tone indignant, as if to imply, "and if you don't know, you ought to," "that practically all the men of your battalion who are not dead are here in this hospital."

"No," said Tony. "I didn't know it."

"Well, then they are," said Quickshaw, almost contemptuously.

"Can I see them?"

"Course you can. Most of them are in the Dangerous Wards."

"Oh . . . I'll go and see them."

To all Englishmen—and Tony was English in this—a visit to the sick in hospital is a difficult and uncomfortable enterprise; and these last words of Quickshaw's did not make the prospect any easier for him. With fear at his heart he asked diffidently:

"Are you coming too?"

"Hang, no!" said Quickshaw. "You can find them out yourself, can't you? The orderlies will show you round."

"Right-ho."

And Tony went off alone.

No. 201 Stationary was a city of Army huts disposed in long lines, between which ran straight roads mapped by white stones; and each road supported at its entrance a notice board which bore a letter of the alphabet. An orderly, on being stopped and questioned, answered that the L line, with its huts L 1, L 2, L 3, and L 4, formed the "Dangerous Wards"; and to the L line, therefore, Tony went, with his heart fearful. Among the names on a Roll shown him by a sergeant who was smoking a cigarette at the entrance to L 3, he found those of Private Sparrow and Private Webster. He stood outside a while, raising the courage to enter.

It was sunny outside; and when he passed into the hut, the change into its dimmer light was so marked that for a few seconds he could distinguish little. He was aware of a clean and pleasing smell of iodoform, and of the buzzing of a late fly or sleepy wasp. The quiet in the ward was remarkable: it seemed as if the occupants of the cots were all asleep. The responsible orderly, standing by a table laden with drugs in varying bottles and with dressings of lint and cotton wool, came forward and greeted him in a whisper—he would have spoken very differently in a livelier ward.

Tony, feeling that a whisper was incumbent on him also, inquired after Private Sparrow.

"Sparrer? Oh, yes."

The orderly compressed his lips despairingly, and shook his head. "He's in the bed in the corner, sir. You can see him if you like."

"Thanks."

Tony went towards the bed. Willie Sparrow lay there asleep; his body, angular with wasting, rested supine, allowing the figure to be outlined beneath the blanket, but his head was turned so that his cheek lay upon the pillow. His face, a smooth one over which no razor had ever passed, looked towards the wall. So small had his frame, spare at the lustiest, become, that it might have been the body of a delicate child. Suddenly conscious that a visitor was looking down at him, he turned his face from the wall and opened upon Tony the startlingly bright eyes of the dying. It was a moment of acute discomfort for Tony. He offered those so-difficult remarks which one offers at bedsides and which seem always so awkward, inadequate and unreal. But the conversation, ill-begun, gathered vitality. A question had been trembling behind the boy's eyes all the time he spoke, and at length he put it, with a touching politeness:

"Excuse me, sir—I suppose there's no harm in asking—but am I going to die?"

"No, no," answered Tony instantly, and with an acted laugh. "Of course not. We'll soon get you well."

"No, sir, but *really*—honestly—I'd rather know."

Tony kept silence; and Sparrow continued:

"I don't *want* to die, sir. . . . Oh, I don't. . . . You see—if you can understand—I feel quite well in myself. It's only a wound, and not any weakness of my own. If only I can get over this, I shall be as strong as anything. . . ."

"*You* won't die," said Tony. "That's all right, old man. Don't you worry about that."

"No, *please*, sir. I—I don't want just to be comforted. . . . For a lot of reasons, I'd rather know the truth. I was brought up religious—there's that—and—I want to write some letters, if it's really all up with me. . . . They won't tell me, sir, but I know—I feel. . . . I should think it a real favour, sir, if *you* would tell me the truth, sir."

Tony did not answer. How could he?

And the boy said again, putting out his hand and touching his officer's: "I mean it, sir."

Tony gulped, and then answered, "Well, sonny, what do *you* think about it?" and offered no further word. But he brought his other hand so that now he held the boy's in both of his.

Private Sparrow stared up, sighed, and said, "Sir, I suppose I am."

"I'm afraid so, lad," said Tony.

The moisture formed around the boy's eyes, but he only added, for his words all through had been as simple as a child's, "Yes. I think I really feel like it."

"Well," said Tony, sitting down upon the bed, "what about things?"

The boy, staring up, left the answer of this question to Tony, who reminded him that Padre Quickshaw was in the hospital.

"I know, sir," said the boy. "He's been very good to us."

"Well, shall I——" began Tony, and conquered his diffidence and continued: "would you like him to have a little Communion service for you here?"

"Oh, I *should*, sir!"

"I'll get him for you. I—I'll go now."

And rising, perhaps glad of an excuse to do something rather than to speak, he walked towards the door, but not three steps had he taken before a voice—a hoarse and breathless voice—stopped him.

"Mr. O'Grogan, sir."

It was Art Webster, in the bed on the other side of the ward.

"Hallo! I was going to look for you next," laughed Tony. "Well, how's things?"

So he asked laughingly, but his heart was twisted at the sight of Art Webster. No doubt about Art Webster: he was further along his road than Willie Sparrow.

"I 'eard what you said to Sparrer, sir," he breathed out hoarsely. "I—I——"

"Yes," encouraged Tony.

"Well, I ain't never bin confirmed, sir, but if you've no objection, I don't mind tyking the Sacrament along of Willie Sparrer. O' course if you think it'd matter my not havin' bin done, well then there's nothin' to it—but I'd like to, if——"

"Why of course, of course you can," smiled Tony. "I'm sure of it."

"I always had a mind to be done," explained Webster, to justify himself further.

"I'm going now to the padre, and I'll ask him."

"Yes, and if the gen'l'man says no, it won't matter, sir; and thank you all the same."

"Ah, but he won't, he won't."

Nor did he. When Tony put Webster's question Quickshaw retorted: "Of course he can join in. What does he suppose?"

It was an hour before Quickshaw could get to the ward, so Tony returned to Sparrow's bedside, and wrote some letters for him at his dictation. There was one to his mother in which a word was said about "being quite happy;"—and be it told here that about a week later a letter written in an unfamiliar hand reached Tony in a ruined cellar at Nieuport: it was from the mother, and in it she said something about "having been good to her boy" and ended with the words, "I used to pray night and day that he might be sent back to me alive, but now that I can no longer do that, I am praying that God will allow you to return to your friends in safety."

Quickshaw came and set up his little table with its linen cloth, and invited the other men in the ward to join in the service if they cared to. He asked them almost rudely, in a tone that suggested, "If you want to, you can; and that's all there is to it. I'm not going to beseech you to do it;" but they understood; and many nodded their willingness to take a part. So he tossed his stole over his neck, and began the service, reading it with a sharp perfunctoriness—rather quickly and angrily—as if he were empty of emotion, or even hostile to it.

Tony knelt on the matting of the floor, the only member of the congregation who was not under sheets. And he told himself, that, believing or not believing—or, rather, believing with his heart if not his brain—he would receive the Sacrament with these his men, and as humbly as they. His heart was near to breaking; and Reason, the cold denier, was dissolved away in the pity and love which broke from the wound. Blindly believing, he would "stand in" with Webster and Sparrow in this last Sacrament before they went out of the daylight into the mystery. And in the same blind trust he would pray for Scrase. He *must* pray for him. What was Doubt against such a need to pray? Something like a joy sprang from this resolve to deal again with the things of God; and as Quickshaw's voice ran on, an old longing swelled in him—the old irrational longing to give himself to God, and to the world, as a priest. He remembered an experience of years before, which had come to him in a dull railway carriage,

after Peggy had gone out of his life on the arm of Michael Saffery her husband ; and that experience was upon him now, but even more strongly. Highly sensitized always, but this afternoon more than ever, to the loneliness and the transitoriness of all living people, he knew in this moment, with a terrible poignance, that nothing mattered except to love as many of them as possible, to serve them, to draw them closer and closer to him and to one another with bands of love, and to do this work quickly, for the night came apace—and all this painted but one picture : the picture of a priest. They were coming to him again to-day with their winning appeal, those who had loved the whole world and laboured for it : St. Francis, St. Aidan, the Blessed Curé d'Ars, Father Damien, and some of the clergy he had known in his father's days. These, the selfless, were the happy men. All petty little selfish and personal loves, were they not marred by faint frustrations, or by their transience ? There was even a frustration in his love for Honor—if only he would face up to it. Oh, to be able to lift this need of loving into a love for God and for the whole world ! To be able to abdicate from reason, or to compound with it, and obey a cry in his nature !

What a call to priesthood may be, who knows ? But this perhaps was the far-away note of a call to Tony, as he knelt by his dying men.

In the next ward, L 4, lay Sergeant Jim Stott. Jim Stott, lying on his bed, was very different from the boy Sparrow, whose flesh had left him before his life. A fever burned in Jim Stott, but it had been powerless to reduce his generous substance. When Tony entered the ward, Jim was lying upon the outside of his bed, naked except for a girdled towel, and displaying a huge figure fashioned of firm flesh and covered with a fair skin. This hospital was accounted too near the shells for sisters to be allowed there, and it fell to a tall and burly R.A.M.C. corporal with a forearm better suited to a sledge-hammer to try by bathing head and body and limbs to reduce the temperature of the fevered man. With the utmost gentleness this burly corporal was passing a sponge up and down the great hairy chest, the stomach strong with muscles and the sinewy limbs of his patient. In power and ripe

manhood these two, the sufferer and his nurse, were a pair. Tony came and stood by them.

"He was my sergeant," he said to the corporal.

Jim Stott, in his delirium, did not recognize him; he was crying out, as the sponge passed up and down him, incoherent things about wounded and dying men. And the corporal accompanied his bathing by soothing and humouring words.

"We're making you better to send you home," said he, never stopping his stroking action.

"Can't tha get the wounded in afore they die?" cried Sergeant Stott.

"We've got 'em in," the corporal assured him, "and they're doing fine."

"Eh, but not all. Not all," the delirious man confidently affirmed. "Ah can see soom there."

The corporal turned to Tony and explained.

"'Tisn't only the fever, sir, that does it. His wits seem to have gone. He's packing up all right."

Tony touched the patient and inquired whether the bathing was making him feel better. A flash of reason seemed to enlighten him and, after staring at Tony with a bewildered look, he answered, "My head's hot and Ah see things."

"That'll be all right soon," said the corporal, and pressed his sponge on the burning forehead.

"It's no good, sister," replied Sergeant Stott, thus paying a blind tribute to the gentleness of his nurse. "Tha'd better let me die. Eh, you can't stop it, lass; they're there still. . . ."

It is enough. The figures of Private Webster, Private Sparrow, and Sergeant Jim Stott have been presented here as those of simple men who, once upon a time, upheld the state for you, and have a claim upon your regard. Here and here did England help you.

CHAPTER IX

THE DEBRIS II

THERE is a farm near Proven behind Poperinghe, where how many battalions have rested, going up at full strength with their bayonets sharpened and their junior officers in privates' kit to take their part in the Salient, and how many have halted on their backward journey, thinking of friends who were in these rooms and barns when last they rested here, it might be possible for archives to show; and the exact number of voices, too, that must have echoed in the brick-paved rooms of its farmhouse, before going onward to be quieted in the mud, this might be worked out by an auditor with a genius for figures; but of all the myriad closeted emotions suffered there by these pilgrims—emotions that were never brought out from behind their curtains of laughter—it is forever beyond the arithmetic of man to make the tally. Doubtless the Flemish farmer and Madame his wife work there now; and to their honest peasant minds, hard and dull, the impregnated walls whisper nothing. When after a laborious day they take their tired bodies to that room upstairs to sleep, their dreams, if they dream at all, are not troubled by the scenes which the room has witnessed; they know nothing of Captain Scrase and Lieut. O'Grogan, and Colonel Tappiter and old Joe Wylie; nor of a shot that was fired here, years and years ago. And that smaller room which opens off this one, and whose door is probably always closed since it holds nothing but lumber and boxes, there Joe Wylie piled his kit and stood his rifle in a corner and cooked a meal for his officers. In the room just across the passage Scrase slept when he was under close arrest, and Tony by his side, as the officer in charge of him. This room itself where, as we conjecture, the farmer and his wife sleep to-day, was no more than their place of messing, for there was ample accommodation—only too ample

—in the farmhouse and the barns for the 15th Royal West Essex when they came back from the battle of Passchendaele, not a hundred bayonets strong. Battalion Headquarters had the ground-floor rooms, and the arrested officer, and Tony his guardian, were lodged—one had almost said “secreted”—in these rooms upstairs.

A late October day in Passchendaele’s year; and Scrase stood staring out of the window at the level plain with its blown poplars, and at the line of sodden tents which flapped on the trampled mud, just beyond the midden, and at the glimpses of other tents arrayed about the meadows behind the screening trees. Perhaps he was thinking that this was the Belgium land for which he had come to fight. Perhaps he was remembering that these were the Flemish Netherlands where so often the English had pitched their tents and perished, and that the years would pass, and a death in 1918 didn’t matter very much. The rain of a whole day had ceased, and the clouds, breaking, had let the sun through. The birds were spangling the evening with their bright notes.

He stood watching and listening. He wore no belt; but Tony, who stood behind him staring at his back, wore his Sam Browne across his breast like an officer on duty. One would have supposed that after a battle which had wrecked them, so that they were but flotsam on the high-water sand, they would have let the past go down with the wreck; but no, the Demiurge of War is not a man that he should pity, and his craftsmanship goes on: one wore a belt and the other did not.

“Kit,” said Tony.

There was no answer.

“Kit.”

Scrase heard, but seemed hardly interested: without turning round he mumbled, “Er?”

“You’ve got to be ready to go down the line with me in about an hour,” explained Tony. “After the battalion’s moved off.”

Then Scrase turned round. His face was deathly pale and thin, as if thought had exhausted him as much as any disease; and the same exhaustion had emptied his wrists, which were attenuated and blue-white. He assumed, however, a laughing manner.

“Court-Martial, I suppose?”

Tony muttered a low affirmative.

"Well——" Scrase shrugged his shoulders—"that's the end of me, I suppose."

Tony, his intellect beaten to dullness, could only answer feebly: "Why fear the worst?"

"What can prevent it?"

"The M.O.s might put up a case for you."

"Ah, but there's nothing wrong with me, Tono," laughed Scrase—"nothing that doctors can find. They can't see a man's will, and explain what happens when it suddenly ceases to work."

"They might put up some sort of—er—mental plea."

"But confound it, Tono, I've never been so clear-brained in my life. I seem to be seeing everything in the whitest possible light." He sat down on the edge of the table and crossed his legs. "And one thing I see very clearly, and it is that there's no explaining my case to a court of simple-minded old regular officers."

"But, Scrase, old man——" Tony walked up and down before continuing—"try and explain it to me. If they'll let me I want to act as your Prisoner's Friend."

"It's useless, Tono. Can you explain ^{be-*this*} : that when I stood in that shell-hole before our attack, I told myself I would go over the top all right—and why not? I wasn't afraid—I cared too little—pooh! I wouldn't have minded if I'd been shot in the first seconds—but—but when the moment to advance came, my body didn't move. It simply didn't obey my will. The men went over, and five minutes later I was still there, and I sat in the mud and cried with disappointment. Can you explain that?"

Tony turned away his face, too miserable to answer.

"I can only plead 'guilty'; and, Tono, isn't it funny, I'm not the least afraid of the firing party. I can think of it as vividly as I like and I don't turn a hair."

"Oh don't!" pleaded Tony. "Don't talk as if it were certain."

"Of course it's certain. And I don't mind. At least, I don't mind going out. All that worries me is the thought of my people knowing the truth, and the men knowing. Gosh! it'll hurt the Alderman my father! If you knew him, you'd see why. He's a Tory of the Tories, and a typical City Father——" Scrase smiled at the picture—"I need say no more. By the way, do the men know?"

"They know you're under arrest, I suppose, but I don't suppose that they need know the—the issue."

"But these sentences are published in General Routine Orders, aren't they?"

"I suppose so," Tony agreed, and fumbled for his cigarette-case to gain time; "but——" he let the cigarette-case stay where it was—"but don't you think that, with the battalion moving off like this into a new sector, and a new army, the—the story may never reach them?"

"I *don't*, Tono: I'm not such a fool. It'll be too rich a story. . . ."

"Nonsense, old man. They may never even know whether you were court-martialled or not."

"What about the men whose testimony'll be taken?"

"I—well—but no one's been warned yet." It was a poor answer, and Tony's heart registered its poorness by a sickly slowing. How could he compete in argument with Scrase, whose brain was moving as perfectly as his own was lumbering if not stopping altogether? "And . . . and, Kit . . . there are not many of the men left who knew anything about you, are there?"

"No. One can almost be glad of it."

"Then again, if the rumour's true, we're going miles north, into the Nieuport sector."

"Yes—Nieuport—and it's quiet there," said Scrase, his eyes wandering with his thoughts away. "You'll all have leave. . . ."

Tony gave no answer. His brain, defeated by simpler things, could not deal with this.

"Don't you think, Bungay," asked Scrase smiling, "that after they've passed sentence of death on a man, they should grant him a Last Leave?"

"Oh don't! . . ." It might have been Tony who was the sufferer, and Scrase the comforter. "The worst hasn't happened yet."

Scrase grasped his knee and whistled a few bars quite merrily. "No, but it's inevitable." He whistled a few more, while preparing his next words: "Bungay, I've something to ask you. If the opportunity were to occur for me to—well, if by accident you were to leave your revolver on the table—would you explain to the Colonel that I didn't do it out of funk, but out of consideration for the regiment? He's a romantic old devil at heart, and he'd understand."

"You mustn't talk like that," murmured Tony.

"Seems a damn sensible way to talk," answered Scrase, lifting his eyebrows humorously. "It would stave off the disgrace to the regiment—it—no, it seems to me a great idea. And then . . . they would let it go through as 'Killed in Action,' which I confess would be a great relief to me. I know they would. I remember just such a case on Gallipoli. . . . Will you promise, then?"

"I promise nothing. You mustn't talk like this."

"Doesn't really matter if you promise or not, old man, because if it happened, you couldn't help telling the Colonel of this conversation. And he'd understand." He smiled at his words.

"We're talking nonsense," Tony protested. "I'm certainly not going to leave my revolver about."

"I might run," suggested Scrase, with eyes still smiling, "and then you'd have to shoot. . . . But I don't want to do that. I don't want to be shot running, or by another hand."

"Oh, shut up, old man," Tony begged.

From the passage outside came Joe Wylie bringing two mugs of tea.

"There was some tea goin' downstairs, sir, and I thought you gen'l'men might like a cup. The men 'ave 'ad theirs, and are being fell in, and the Colonel and the Adjutant's gawn to march 'em off. It's quite lonely dahn there." His next words were for Scrase. "And 'ow are you feelin' nah, sir? Several of the men arst after you, and kindly, sir."

"What did you say to them?" Scrase inquired.

"I said you was proper ill, that's all. I said, 'I expect 'es for 'awspital.'" By now Joe had placed a mug of tea on the table by the side of Scrase and given the other to Tony, who had walked away with it towards the window. Joe did not seem anxious to go, but stood with one hand twisting a button on his jacket. "Well, now, sir—by the by, sir—did I ever tell you this one? Did I ever tell you 'ow——"

"Don't tell us now, Wylie," Scrase interrupted, laughing again. "Tell us later."

"Here's the Colonel coming," Tony warned.

"O my Gawd!" exclaimed Joe in a deliberately comical panic. And he fell to a panicky tidying of the room. A little comedy, a little jollity, was all the ministration he could offer

to the pain in the room; and he wanted to offer something. "The Colonel—Gawd help us! 'E's comin' up 'ere, you bet. . . . 'Ere, 'ow much time 'ave we got, sir?"

Scrase's thoughts seemed to return from straying. "Er—what did you say, Tono?"

"The Colonel's coming across the fields. He's coming here, I think."

"Oh, I—I'd rather not see him, unless I must. . . . I'll—I'll go in the other room and—yes, I can be packing."

Forgetful of Wylie he went out hurriedly, crossed the passage and closed his door.

Joe heard the door shut and turned towards his officer. "Don't it proper do you up, sir, to see him like that?"

"Yes," agreed Tony.

"I suppose he realizes he's *for* it all right. Gawd! what on earth must he be thinking? . . . Does it seem quite fair to you, sir?"

"In what way?"

"It don't to me, sir. Ahter all, what's 'e done? Bitten awf a bit more of the poker than he could chew, that's all, sir. With a headpiece like his, he ought to 'a' bin a Staff Officer, then he'd 'ave 'ad a nice cushy job. But he chose to be with the Infantry—the boys that are getting on with the war—and he's stuck it aht long after he was a doner, and gaw lummy, sir! if you arst me, a feller that takes on a tough job and messes it up in the end may be as good a feller as 'im that takes on a soft job and gits through with it."

"Surely, Wylie," agreed Tony.

"Yes, and I mean: I admire 'im for it, because you never caught me takin' on the 'ard job if there was a soft one going. Nah, not on your life!"

"But you joined the Infantry, Joe," Tony represented, "when you might have joined the A.S.C. or something?"

"Yes, but jest to be along of some of me pals. And ain't I bin a-cussin' of meself for it ever since? And ain't I dodged the front line whenever it was possible? Gawd, yes! *you* know that, sir! Not 'alf!"

"You've done your bit, Joe, I think."

"Not as 'e 'as, sir. No, it's a shyme, I reckon. He done 'is best for the country, and now 'is country's goin' to start bullying 'im abaht instead of jest takin' 'im aht of the job which he's no good for any more, and usin' 'im in one which

'e'd do well. Strikes me the country's a chump, sometimes. . . . Is the Colonel comin' nearer, sir?"

"Yes, he's just at the door."

"Is 'e? Well, good-bye, sir." It was a comedian's exit such as Joe Wylie loved.

The Colonel's feet were on the stairs, and Tony waited for him. He entered in full marching kit, his revolver and map-case at his belt.

"Good evening, O'Grogan. I thought I'd better speak to Scrase before we move off."

"Yes, sir."

"How is he?"

"He's—he's resigned to the worst, sir. . . . Do you think he has a chance?"

"Not a ghost," said the Colonel. "This Passchendaele business has gone on too long. When you've got a Divisional Order posting policemen behind the attack to shoot any loiterers, dammit, they're not going to—they *can't* spare an officer."

Tony bowed his head.

"He doesn't seem worried about himself, sir," said Tony, "but only about the disgrace to the regiment if he's shot, and the fear of his people getting to hear of it. He practically asked me to leave my revolver lying about."

"*Ur?*" inquired the Colonel sharply. "No, you can't do that. You can't do that."

"He argued it out perfectly quietly, sir—almost jovially—that if he—er—did this, and if you understood that it wasn't cowardice, he would save the regiment the disgrace of it all, and perhaps rehabilitate himself—and—and perhaps you'd let it go through as 'Killed in Action.'"

"Poor fellow!" sighed the Colonel; and, bemuddled by the conflict in him now between the two forces of his mind—between the soldierly sternness which was his dream and the human kindness which was himself—he sat down and fell into a long silence. At last he said: "No, it's too late to think of all these things now. . . . He should have . . . No, we can't monkey about like that. . . ."

"I suppose not," Tony agreed; and as he said it, he was surprised by the sinking of his heart.

That sinking gave him sight: it brought right home to him the inevitability of Scrase's sentence; then the full realization of what such a calamity meant; then his own passionate

resistance against it and his cold desire that anything other than this should happen to Scrase—*anything*—even the alternative which Kit himself had suggested. Oh yes, yes: a thousand times better that Scrase should have his way than that the Law should have its way with Scrase. The Colonel was seated and silent; and Tony was silent too as he paced up and down. Probably the Colonel's mind was stationary in its bewilderment: not so Tony's: behind a wrinkled and aching forehead, he was working up to the most difficult decision of his life. It was he who first spoke; and when he spoke he was surprised at the fluency which passion was giving him.

"Sir," he began, "I can't help thinking that, though legally there may not be the faintest chance for Scrase, we ought to be able to get round the Law somehow. I always like to think that the English have too much humour and horse-sense to sacrifice their souls to Law and to Logic; I mean: we often manage, if a man's technically guilty but morally innocent, to let a little good sense flood the situation and save him. There was a case on Gallipoli which delighted me at the time, when it was arranged behind the scenes that all the papers dealing with the technically guilty man should be 'destroyed by gunfire.' I remember you laughed at the time and agreed that it was characteristically English."

"I remember," the Colonel acknowledged: "Corporal Player of the 19th East Lancs; yes, it was neatly done, that." To his romantic mind such praise of his country was a sure appeal.

"Well, then, sir—about Scrase. Of course, technically, he's as guilty as ever man was, but look at what he's done: three years' absolutely top-hole work in the regiment, when, as I believe, he was feeling perfectly putrid all the time. Oh we can't—we can't be going to be so unhumorous as to shoot him. Surely—surely something can be done."

The Colonel gave a long time to getting his disorganized brain around his subaltern's argument. Once or twice he started an answer and abandoned it, returning into himself. Tony stayed by the window, looking out. It must have been several minutes before the Colonel spoke.

"I'm impressed by what you say, O'Grogan. . . . I am really. . . . And I wish to God I could do something to save Scrase. . . . But it would be unfair to suggest that I thought

there was any hope for him. I *know* there isn't. . . . On paper it's too black a case. First an S.I. and then——"

Tony wheeled round from the window.

"Then, dammit, sir, let us—let *us* have the humour to give him the chance he's asked for. Look here, sir: I'm in charge of him, and God knows what my penalty'll be for neglecting my duty, but I'm prepared to face that, and I'll—I'll go out and leave my revolver behind on the table. I'll"—the tears were in his voice now—"I count him just about my best friend, but I'm ready to be his executioner, if it'll save him any misery—if it'll mean that his men never hear that he was shot for cowardice, and his parents are told that he was 'killed in action.' I will, sir. I will, really."

"No, O'Grogan. No," stuttered the Colonel, "dammit, you mustn't do that. . . I can't allow that. . . ."

With a sigh Tony turned back to his window. The charged silence possessed the room again.

"If anybody had to take the responsibility for a thing like that," said the Colonel, "*I* would. Damn, O'Grogan! If it's hell for you, what's it for me who had to put him under arrest? . . ."

Silence again. Who could know what the Colonel was thinking? Some minutes later he also sighed, and looked at his wrist-watch.

"O'Grogan," he ordered, "go and tell Major Chamberlain that if I'm not there at the time, he's to march the battalion off himself. I shall follow."

"Yes, sir," said Tony woodenly—almost sullenly—and walked with studied smartness towards the door.

"And, O'Grogan: don't hurry back. I will be responsible here, and I may want to talk to Scrase."

"Very good, sir. . . . Sir"—the sullenness was gone—"you'll do what you can for him, won't you, sir?"

"Of course, O'Grogan."

Tony went; and the Colonel sat alone—pondering—pondering. At one time his hand strayed down towards the revolver at his belt; but his expression and his falling hand showed that he had relinquished an idea which had visited him. Another time he turned his head towards the door as if to call Scrase, but relinquished this plan also.

It was Joe Wylie who put an end to his thoughts by coming into the room and saying:

"Gaw! I beg your pardon, sir. I thought you was Mr. O'Grogan. *My* mistake, sir."

"You're Mr. O'Grogan's batman, aren't you?" asked the Colonel.

"Yessir."

"I hope you're a little less slovenly than you were."

"Yessir."

"I've had my eye on you before, haven't I?"

"Well, yes, you 'ave, sir."

"Er——" A new idea seemed to visit the Colonel. He said to himself, "H'm . . ." and then to Joe: "You're the Regimental Humorist, aren't you?"

"*Wur!* I shouldn't like to say that, sir."

"But you have a talent for entertaining the men with stories, eh?"

"I do sometimes, sir."

"And I suppose you think you've got the story of your life now."

"How, sir?"

"With one of your officers under close arrest, and—whatever may happen to him."

Joe brushed the knuckle of his forefinger under both sides of his moustache.

"It don't strike me as a funny story, sir. Rather the other way."

"But it's a damned fine story to tell," reminded the Colonel, fixing his eye on Joe. "I suppose it would be asking a miracle to ask you not to tell it."

"Not to tell what, sir?"

"Well, whatever may be the end of it all."

"I wouldn't if you arst me not to, sir, and if it'd be any satisfaction to Captain Scrase."

"What would you do when the men pumped you for information?"

"I'd tell 'em a power of lies if I 'ad to, sir."

"Good!" said the Colonel, laughing, but with no real mirth. "You can invent stories, eh?"

"I do sometimes maké 'em up, sir."

"Well, Wylie, what about never telling the true story but inventing a better one instead, eh?"

Joe was now staring back at the Colonel.

"I dessay I could think out something, sir."

"Do it, then. You say you're sorry for him."

"Yes, sir. If I may say so, *yes*, sir."

"Right. Then you won't want to add more punishment to any he may have to take?"

At this Joe's expression clouded with a mild perplexity.
"Add to it, sir?"

"Add the extra shame and disgrace which would come if it were talked about and known. His parents, you see."

"Oh, I *know* them, sir. His father's Alderman Scrase in our Burrer—a fine old gen'l'man——"

"All the more reason why you shouldn't talk now or when you go on leave. It seems a small thing to ask you to give up this damned fine story, but I know enough of human nature to see that it isn't. . . . You will, though?"

"*Yurse*, sir. You trust *me*, sir."

"All right. . . . H'm. . . ." The Colonel looked towards the door of Joe's room. "Do you sleep in there?"

"Yessir."

"H'm. . . . Well. . . . I suppose you're expecting to go on leave soon?"

"Yes, sir. I bin sweatin' on my leave for some time now."

"I'll do what I can to put it through at once."

"Thank you, sir."

Joe was moving towards the room when the Colonel, his eyes on the ground, called to him again. "If you like to go and see the battalion off, Wylie, you may. You can tell Mr. O'Grogan I sent you."

"I think I ought to be packin', sir. We're supposed to be moving off after the battalion——"

"Oh, damn that!" snapped the Colonel, irritably. "That's all right. There's no hurry."

"Right, sir. Then I think I will jest nip awf. Thank you, sir."

And Joe Wylie followed Tony out into the falling dusk. Colonel Tappiter sat on in his chair, rather dumpily, as if the battle in his mind was weighing him down. A misery of indecision, such as his, relaxed a figure usually erect. He heard very far away the voices of his officers shouting the orders of the march to the battalion, and the tramping of many feet as the battalion passed along the road by the farm-yard gate. The men, marching at ease, were whistling in unison,

"When we've wound up the Watch on the Rhine . . ." and they carried the tune away with them down the road. He stood up and went to the window, and saw the afterglow of the sunset behind the furthest trees. Then he looked towards the door of Joe Wylie's room. As if merely curious at first, he walked to the door and pushed it open. There was Joe Wylie's kit, neatly folded and piled on the floor, and his rifle leaning against the corner. He went in and picked up the webbing equipment, and looked at the ammunition pouches with their clips of cartridges. He dropped the equipment so that it fell back untidily on the folded blankets and ground-sheet. He looked at the rifle: it was clean, and he restored it to its corner. He came out and pulled the door after him, but not so that it latched; and he began the sentry-go of a frustrated thinker up and down the room. Up and down, up and down—Oh God, for a decision! He took his debate back to the chair and sat down, wrestling with it still. His arm, lying along the table, kept automatically lifting up its hand and letting it fall; and later he discovered that he was examining his nails, and idly tending them. Well, one couldn't sit here for ever—O'Grogan would be back soon. "Leave it to chance? I dunno." Scrase: a good fellow; one of the best, really; had served him splendidly for three years all over the world. And now a firing party—a wall. Oh damn, no! The boy was right in asking an opportunity to escape from that. And young O'Grogan was right in all he said too. The boy could be given his opening, if—if he himself could make up his mind about it. For himself it would mean what? Understanding from the Higher Powers, probably, if he told the truth to the Court of Enquiry; or a mere censure, and there an end, did he plead guilty to no more than negligence in the matter: and in any case, the applause or the punishment that might be his—these were unimportant considerations. To stiffen his decision that the action itself was right, this was all that exercised him now.

But the action—oh, it was awful—he couldn't do it. . . . But if he didn't do it he left Scrase to his fate, and that was more awful. Was he to be a coward too, and just run away from an ordeal, and leave a boy to his fate? A firing party for Scrase? Damn! it *wasn't* thinkable. He rose up again and walked to the door of Wylie's room, and stood opposite for a while longer, before his will worked. Then with his foot

he kicked at the door so that it swung open, disclosing the rifle leaning against the corner and the tumbled belt of cartridges lying on the kit.

Coming away and standing by the table once more, he called, "Scrase"; and, not receiving an answer, called again.

"Sir!"

Scrase was leaving the room across the passage, and now came into his presence.

"I—er—thought I must say good-bye to you, Scrase. The battalion has gone, and I'm just going to follow it. I—er—I wanted to say good-bye to you."

"Thank you, sir. . . . Good-bye." Nervously Scrase put out his hand, but the Colonel did not at once take it.

"And I should like to tell you that I am immensely grateful for all you've done, and—er—whatever happens over this wretched business, you can be certain that I shall—I shall do my best to insure that your parents hear only a good report of you. O'Grogan was telling me all you'd been saying about them."

"Thank you, sir." Scrase said it with a smile. "I *was* a bit anxious about them."

"Well, you needn't be. . . . No, I don't think you need be. . . . It's quite possible for me to pull all sorts of strings, you know. . . ." (When had he said those words before—*when* was it?)

"Yes, sir. And I—I should like to say that the only other thing that worries me is the thought of having brought disgrace on the battalion."

"Oh, well . . . perhaps that won't happen. . . . You know that among the officers, at any rate, you are getting nothing but sympathy and—yes, I think I may say, admiration for your work in the past—"

"But there's no chance for me, sir, is there?"

The Colonel, suddenly afraid that his last words might have raised impossible hopes, looked him faithfully in the eyes.

"I'm afraid not, Scrase. . . . Forgive me, but I don't want to be dishonest with you."

"No, sir. . . . I understand. Thank you."

Colonel Tappiter stretched out his hand.

"Good-bye, then, Scrase."

"Good-bye, sir," said Scrase, taking the Colonel's hand

firmly, who gripped his and held it. . . . "But excuse me, sir, where's O'Grogan?"

"I—I sent him out for a bit, but he should be back soon. And his batman too—so you'll be alone for a little while."

A curious look appeared on Scrase's face.

"Thank you, sir."

"Oh, that's nothing . . . that's nothing . . ." and he released Scrase's hand. "Well, I must be going. . . . Yes. . . ."

And without another word he went quietly down the stairs. He passed out into the yard before the farmhouse and walked towards the gate in the roadside wall. There he turned and hurried back; but stopped and paused—and turned round again. Reaching the road, he walked a little way till the side of the house hid him from the view of the window of Scrase's room. There he waited. He saw O'Grogan returning, and moved as if to stop him—but paused again. If things were not to be as he had imagined them, they were *not* to be. In two minutes' time O'Grogan would be back in that room; and he himself could hurry off to his horse and his groom, and canter after the battalion. But even as he thought this, a shot rang out from a room in the farmhouse; and the Colonel, with a sharp intake of breath and a face very white, hurried back to it.

CHAPTER X

JOE WYLIE GOES ON LEAVE

TONY was spurring his horse along the road from Poperinghe to Oostvleteren. All feeling blunted within him, he thought of nothing but a present dour purpose to find Quickshaw and bring him back to Proven. For Quickshaw was moving with Brigade Headquarters to the north. The whole brigade was gone; Colonel Tappiter was gone—gone to tell his story and “pull his strings;” not a man of the Royal West Essex battalions, except himself and Wylie, was left in Proven village. A new brigade with a new chaplain had taken over the old tents and barns; and they were too interested by far in the waiting body of his friend. These strangers might have to dig Kit’s grave, but their padre should not bury him. On that Tony was resolved: he had already quarrelled hotly with this alien chaplain. This pompous little parson to sit in judgment on Kit, who was worth a hundred of him!

So now, every feeling except an angry purpose blunted within him, Tony cantered and galloped towards Quickshaw. One day perhaps he would try to think out all that had happened within the last few days, but not now—not now. Now let him only ride on, too bruised in mind to suffer much. It was good to have something to do.

When Quickshaw heard about the alien chaplain, he said only, “Pfaw! these wretched little legalists! I hate them. A wood louse shows more imagination. I expect, if the truth’s known, he’s only been out about four or five minutes.” And he borrowed a horse and rode back with Tony.

Tony led him straight to the battalion headquarters where the new chaplain lived; and as he entered the room he detected in himself a snobbish satisfaction that Quickshaw wore a crown on his shoulder-straps (or should have worn one), whereas

the stranger wore only three stars. Partly to emphasize this seniority, and partly to vex the legalist mind of the stranger who would insist that chaplains should be called "Mr." he announced, "This is Major Quickshaw."

"Oh yes," acknowledged the chaplain brightly. "My name's Irwin."

Quickshaw, with his protruding eyes, scanned the man before him. He saw a tall and slender young man of thirty, with large dull eyes and an obstinate mouth, but, otherwise, a face well-meaning enough. He saw also a very smart uniform, complete with white collar and black stock, bran new leggings and shining brown boots. Tony, watching Quickshaw's face, knew at once that he was summing up the result of this survey in the verdict, "No, *he'll* never learn anything," but all that Quickshaw said aloud was, "Well, what's the trouble?"

"Oh, there's no trouble," said Irwin, with the pleasant conciliatory tone that many parsons acquire. "Nothing to speak of."

"Oh, *isn't* there, by God!" muttered Tony, not wholly to himself.

"All that happened was," explained Irwin, "that this officer went off the deep end when I——"

"Would you mind if we talked it over a little less flippantly?" asked Quickshaw. "This officer and I *feel* the matter rather."

"Oh, I'm sorry! I didn't mean to sound flippant. He was rather rude to me when I told him I couldn't conscientiously bury his friend with the full rites of the Church."

Quickshaw stared at him—as at a phenomenon which repaid study. "Why?" he demanded at last.

"Well . . ." Irwin hesitated. "You know the rubric at the beginning of the Burial Office——"

"I'm sure I don't," answered Quickshaw. "I've forgotten it. What is it?"

"Oh, nonsense!" laughed Irwin, as if he thought Quickshaw himself was joking now. "You know that it says that the Office isn't to be used on persons who 'have laid violent hands upon themselves.'"

Again Quickshaw stared in amazement at the young man; and when he spoke, the spawl had formed at his lips.

"Does it? I had forgotten. I suppose I knew it once—before the war."

It was plain that Irwin did not know what to make of this slovenly little figure with the staring eyes; and he looked elsewhere, in some discomfort.

"So I represented to this officer," he continued, "that we could only obey the rules of the Church, whatever our private feelings might be. We can't set up our private feelings against Authority——"

"Oh, can't we?" said Quickshaw. "*I can.*"

"I'm sorry; but then that's where we differ. I told this officer that I would do all that I reasonably could. I have an abbreviated Office which I usually take in these cases, and it commends the—er—the dead man to the 'uncovenanted mercies of God.'"

"A very nice phrase!" interrupted Quickshaw, with an ugly movement of his lower lip. "It's—s'wonderful how we can fall in love with words. But may I ask when such a case has come your way before?"

"Oh, they crop up now and then, in peace time, as you know. We're a very large London parish."

"Oh—in peace time? Yes," Quickshaw nodded; and his tone might have meant anything.

"And I promised him I'd do all that. More I couldn't do—and won't. One must have *some* principles, mustn't one? You, I imagine, are prepared to do more."

"Oh yes; just a little more," sneered Quickshaw. "Just a little more. It may interest you to know that I've buried seventeen hundred and fifty men since this war started, and I reckon that Captain Scrase was about the best of them. If ever you attain to a tenth part of his quality, my son, you'll begin to understand what principles are. I shall say the complete Office over him, and a good deal more."

"Oh well, that's *your* responsibility," shrugged Irwin, who was annoyed.

"Thanks . . . yes. . . . And may I ask you a question: have you been out very long?"

"Out where?"

"'Been out' is a phrase we use in these parts for 'Been at the front.' But perhaps you'd understand 'Been on Active Service' better—I believe that's the stilted phrase. Have you been on active service long?"

The young man blushed; and this was the first time that Tony perceived the curious little war which was developing

in these later years—the camouflaged hostility between the “old hands” and the new-comers from England.

“No,” he admitted, “not very long.”

“I thought not. A year, perhaps?”

“No . . . not as much as that . . .” the young man prevaricated, rather sullenly.

“Well, I won’t compel you to say ‘three months,’” began Quickshaw with a scornful laugh.

“I’ve been out longer than that——” snapped Irwin.

“Have you?—well,” Quickshaw took him up, “when you’ve had another seven years of it, you may have learnt some sense; but I doubt it. Meanwhile you might study with profit a pompous ass in Bunyan called Mr. Legality. Try and get yer intelligence to work on it. . . . Come on, O’Grogan——” the resentful fish-like eyes flashed up at Tony; “we’ll go and look into this matter.”

They passed out from the presence of Irwin; and as they walked away, Quickshaw’s only comment was, “Pfoo! he’s a worm and no man.”

Four men of the strange brigade laid Scrase in the earth, and the only other mourners who stood by were Tony, Joe Wylie, Quickshaw. Irwin watched the proceedings from a few paces away. He heard Quickshaw mutter with angry compassion, as he always did, the words which he always used: “We thank Thee, Father, for the life and work of this our brother; we praise Thee for his high soul, faithful unto death. . . .”

Next day Tony left Proven to attend a Court of Enquiry held in secret; and Joe Wylie went on leave.

Joe Wylie had never been in such a room, nor Mrs. Wylie either; and their eyes roamed around its pictures and its furniture, as the manservant, pushing open the door, passed them in before him, in the most gentlemanly way. They thought it a beautiful room, and so artistic: with its heavy, gilt-framed pictures, its rich brocade curtains and long lace ones, its huge break-fronted bureaux, its grand piano covered with photographs in silver frames, its occasional tables and its tall palm. On one side, of the chesterfield sofa, which stood at an angle from the fireplace, there was a little flounced

work-table ; and from this Mrs. Wylie deduced that the Lady of the House was a motherly woman—but that was the limit of her deductions. On the other side and against the wall was a table holding the Gentleman's books and journals : *The Morning Post*, *Punch*, *The Conservative Party Journal*, *The National Review*, a novel of Bulwer Lytton's and a more modern work of Miss Dell's—and from these, Joe Wylie, as his eye fell upon them, deduced nothing at all. It was not in Joe, nor in Tib Wylie his wife, to read a great part of Alderman Scrase's character, and Mrs. Scrase's, from the furnishings of their Drawing Room.

So far as it was possible for Joe to be tidy and clean, he was so this evening ; he had "spruced himself up" for this visit ; or perhaps Mrs. Wylie had given a hand to the business. His hair was greased down ; his moustache, for once, was regimanted with wax, and on his khaki there were many light patches which had obviously been dark ones before the friction of a rag dipped in petrol. As for Tib, she was magnificent ; an ample blonde, she was dressed in all her feathery best ; and her best was full in the fashion of 1917 as reflected by the poor.

"Mr. Scrase will be down very shortly to see you," said the manservant.

"Yuss." It was all that Joe could say.

Not so Mrs. Wylie ; she was full of curiosity and eager to satisfy it. "What's this room ?" she asked. "This the Drorin' Room ?"

"Yes—er," said the manservant, his lips having attempted the "madam," but failed.

"Is this where they sit after supper ?"

"They sit here after dinner," the manservant announced. "Or sometimes in the Second Drawing Room."

Mrs. Wylie cast a look at her husband. "They've *two* Drorin' Rooms, Jow. Fency !"

"Yuss," said Joe.

"And Mrs. Scrase, pore lydy," asked Tib, returning to her questioning of the servant : "how is she now ?"

"She's picking up."

"Yur——" Mrs. Wylie's head shook—"the noos must 'a' bin an awful shock."

The manservant bowed ; "nodded" would be a word suggesting too rapid a *tempo*. "We are all very much upset," he told her.

"Yurse——" plainly she had no use for this equation of a servant's grief with a parent's—"but she was his mother, yer see. Oh, if I've once imagined meself gettin' the same noos about Jow, I've imagined it fifty times, and it's—it's——" already her eyes were awash, having adjusted themselves to her words—"it's proper played me up every time."

"Still," interrupted Joe, who seemed afraid that Tib might go on and say too much, "he was killed in action. It wasn't like as if—I mean, it was a fine sorta death."

The manservant bowed again. "That is our consolation," he announced; and, since this appeared a good sentence on which to make his exit, bowed once more—somewhat doubtfully—and retired.

"Now, Tib," adjured Wylie quickly, "do be careful now. I'm not so 'appy about your 'avin' come. I don't know what you wanted to come for."

"Ow, I 'ad to see what their 'ome was like," Tib explained, "and I guessed they'd show us up into the Drorin' Room like this. Eh, Jow; ain't it an enormous plyce, with manservants and all?"

"Never mind that," Joe objected. "What I meanter say is——"

"Is that his photo?" asked Tib, pointing to a portrait on the mantelpiece whose silver frame had been raised to the dignity of a little easel and decorated across one corner with the ribbon of the Military Cross.

"Gaw!" exclaimed Joe, coming close. "Yes, that's 'im—yuss, pore lad. But don't 'e look much younger there?"

"O Jow. . . ." This pitiful cry was Mrs. Wylie's poem on the death of Kit Scrase; it was all she could utter as she gazed at the face of the young man, but many far more elaborate laments have sprung from a smaller pain and an indignation less sincere.

Joe fled from the threat of tears.

"Well, never mind that," he repeated. "What I meanter say is: when I get in here, I wish I'd never towld you the real truth. I ain't towld it to no one else—honest to God I ain't—but——"

"But you down think that I——" all the aggrievement of a very romantic woman was in Mrs. Wylie's tone—"you down think that by so much as a look I'd let the pore sufferin' lydy suspect anything. I'd tear me tongue out first."

"No, you wouldn't do it directly, Tib; not *directly*. But you'll be so up in the air, havin' called on the Alderman, and bein' shown by a manservant into the parlour, that you'll get talkin'—and then you'll get confidential——"

"Ow, I shan't! I shan't never! Ain't I given you me absolute word of honour I won't?"

"Still——" Joe Wylie shook his head and walked despairingly towards the mantelpiece—"I wish to Gawd I 'adn't never told yer. I ain't told another soul, I swear I 'aven't."

"But a wife's different," protested Mrs. Wylie, both for his rebuke and for his comfort. "She and her husband are the same person like. Tellin' 'er's jest about the same as keepin' it to yerself."

"It ought to be," said Joe to the mantelpiece, "but blarst me if it generally works out like that."

Mrs. Wylie was hurt. "Well, dah't me word if you want to. But I given it. I can't do no more. I said, and I say again: if ever I tell, may I be struck dead where I stand. There! I can't say more than thet, can I?"

She had hardly invoked this curse before the Alderman and his wife entered. Joe and Tib Wylie saw a tall, attenuated, grey-haired gentleman of sixty, about whom everything was very smart except his tumbled old snuff-coloured smoking jacket. This garment, no doubt, was the standard which he ran up the mast when Duty, his sovereign, was not in residence; but all the rest of his dress to-night was fresh from her courts and as ceremonial as need be: black striped morning trousers, black waistcoat, white slip, high starched collar, and big bunched tie pierced by a golden pin. A pompous but conscientious, kindly and romantic gentleman—so cleverer eyes than the Wylies' might have judged. And Mrs. Scrase, who had preceded him through the door, gallantly held open for her, was exactly the partner they would have expected of him; she was as inevitable as any item of his attire (it might be surmised, indeed, that she *was* an item of that attire): a kindly, conscientious, romantic lady, in a gown of black silk relieved by a heavy golden chain and some folds of grey chiffon. Possessing a number of valuable rings, she liked to wear them all at once, and could do so without vulgarity. Nothing could ever be vulgar about Alderman Scrase's wife, because her quiet manner would tune everything down to its own note: she was

one of those refined, soft, gentle old ladies who gave no quarter to Germans.

"Very good of you to come, Wylie," said the Alderman, who could not help a certain pomposity when speaking to a private soldier. "It was most fortunate that you should be on leave at this—er——" and here, even in so sad an interview, the language of the Council Chamber took command—"this juncture. I am naturally glad of the opportunity to ask you several things."

"Yuss, sir," said Joe.

Mrs. Scrase meanwhile was glancing at Mrs. Wylie. "And this is——?" she asked.

"His wife, mum," answered Mrs. Wylie, prompt to introduce herself. "Mrs. Wylie, mum. Yuss."

"Oh I see," Mrs. Scrase bowed.

"I jest come along," explained Mrs. Wylie, nodding in a rich condolence, "to offer you me sympathy, mum. I've heard so much from Jow here of your boy that I feel as if I almost knew him and me heart goes out to you——"

"Thank you," said Mrs. Scrase. "Everyone is most kind. Do please sit down."

"Yuss. Thank you, mum."

They all sat down, Joe on one stiff chair and his wife on another; Mrs. Scrase on the chesterfield, and the Alderman in his favourite fireside chair, which he pulled round so that he could face the visitors. Then silence seized hold of all.

"My boy often mentioned you in his letters, Wylie," tried Mr. Scrase, "and always with appreciation."

"Yuss. Thank you, sir."

The silence again; and Mrs. Scrase rearranged her chiffon before playing her part.

"Yes, he used to tell us how you would come in and amuse them all with your stories and your jokes. A great story-teller, aren't you, Mr. Wylie?"

"Oh—nothin' to write 'ome about, mum," Joe demurred.

"Yes, you are; you know you are!" objected Mrs. Wylie. "That's right, mum: he is. He knows 'ow to tell a story if anyone does. They're always wantin' 'im at their sing-songs dahn at the—dahn at the 'otel."

The Alderman, who had not been listening to this, coughed and examined the fingers of his right hand.

"And now, Wylie: you were with him when he died, I understand; will you tell us exactly how he met his end? My wife and I have decided that we can bear it."

"Yes, you tell 'em, Jow," encouraged Mrs. Wylie; and she turned towards Mrs. Scrase in her eagerness to show sympathy. "Ow, it's a lovely story, mum. I feel I should only be prah'd if I was his ma; you know, more prah'd and 'appy than sad—like."

"Thank you," said Mrs. Scrase. "I shall try to be."

"Please go on, Wylie," said the Alderman.

"Well, it was like this 'ere, sir," said Joe. "We did a bit of an attack in front of Ee-prez, and Captain Scrase, he was jumpin' aht of his shell-hole when the zero hour come and hollerin' to his men to rush forward and do their damnest, when he suddenly—in his excitement—slipped back, as you might say, and sprained his ankle good and proper. And the boys had to go on without 'im and tyke their objectives. Well, you can imagine; with a gen'l'man like your son, he took it dreadful hard, 'avin', as you might say, stayed behind his men at the critical moment; and he begged and begged that he might be given the next raid to lead, or the next dangerous job——"

Mr. Scrase nodded. "I wouldn't have had him do otherwise," he said. "Please go on."

"But it so 'appened, sir," continued Joe, "that almost immediately the battalion was moved aht to rest billets, and he was proper cut up because he would have no opportunity to lead his men again. And when we got to a place called Proven, the rumour come that we were going north to a very cushy spot—Nieuport, to be exact. Of course everyone was fairly chortlin' except Captain Scrase, sir, and 'e'd got it fixed in his head that he ought to go back and do a charge or something."

"I understand, I understand," said the Alderman.

"So he worried the colonel to death abaht it and—and, well, would you believe it, sir, the very night the battalion was movin' out of Proven there come another battalion which was going up the line and wanted an awficer guide. And Captain Scrase, 'e says at once, 'That's me, sir. I'm the only one that wants to go back.' And the Colonel says, 'You're a bloody fool, Scrase——'" Joe turned to Mrs. Scrase: "they all talk like that, mum, but they don't mean nothing by it—not

really—‘You’re a ruddy fool, Scrase,’ he says, ‘but you’re a brave one. Go along of ’em, then.’ So Captain Scrase, pleased as your life, come along and says to Mr. O’Grogan—his friend as you’ve heard of, I expect, sir—I was doing batman for both of them just then, because we was a bit short o’ men after Ee-prez—really—he says, ‘I’ll ehta tyke Wylie along o’ me,’ he says, and you can bet I wasn’t pleased at all. So back to the line we went—Mr. O’Grogan got left behind at Proven on some cleanin’-up job, and he’ll bear me aht in this—and when we got back to the old shell-oles and bits of trench, we found the old Boche in them, and the very first thing we ’ad to do was to counter-attack and drive ’em aht. Now there was no need for your Mr. Scrase to take part in the attack, he bein’ only sort o’ temporarily attached, but he insisted on tyking over a platoon whose awficer had jest gawn sick. And when the time come, he simply went over hell-fer-leather, yellin’ aht to the boys, ‘Them’s *ah’r* trenches, not the old Boches’. Who’s comin’ ’ome?’ And he was the fust to leap into one of the old shell-oles, and there he was, shootin’ right and left, almost on the very spot where he’d tumbled and bin left behind before. Well, he stopped one, sir, but it didn’t kill ’im, not straight away, and he kept yellin’ aht, ‘Consolidate the position. . . . Consolidate. . . . Consolidate,’ till he lawst consciousness.”

“Were you there to see all this?” asked Mr. Scrase.

“N-no, sir,” Joe admitted. “But I had it all from one of the men who was singin’ his praises. Well, we got ’im back as far as Proven, and there—there, mum, he passed away.”

“I see,” murmured Mrs. Scrase, while her husband studied the carpet.

“Yuss,” said Joe.

“And did he—did he regain consciousness?” asked Mrs. Scrase.

“No, mum; you can trust me that he never had no pain. And let me tell you this, mum: there was a very smart battalion in the Proven billets at the time, and they give ’im a fine funeral. *Yur*, thet’s *absolutely* true: Mr. O’Grogan—Captain O’Grogan as he is now—he see to that. And him and me stood by and watched it all. We was the only ones of his regiment there.”

“I see,” Mrs. Scrase nodded. “And—his grave?”

“It’s there, mum,” said Joe. “In a line with the others.”

"Has it a cross?"

"Oh yes, mum. A cross the same as the others, with his name, jest simple like: 'Captain Scrase. Killed in Action. R.I.P.' . . . Yuss, I made it meself."

All of them, since in imagination they stood before this grave, honoured it with silence. It must be for the Alderman to dismiss the silence.

"Thank you, my man," he said. "You have made us very happy."

And Mrs. Scrase echoed him. "Thank you, Mr. Wylie."

"Oh, it's nothin', sir," said Joe. "You're very welcome."

"And if there's anything I can do for you at any time——" began the Alderman.

"Nah, sir. Don't you worry, sir. I've only got six more days' leave, and 'eaven knows when I shall be back in these parts again."

Mrs. Scrase withdrew the handkerchief with which she had touched her eyes. "Oh, you are going back, are you?"

"Yes, mum."

Rising, so that Joe rose too, she put out her hand; and he took it awkwardly. "Ah, God keep you safe," she said. "I shall be praying for you."

"Yuss, mum," acknowledged Joe. "Thank you, mum."

"Take care of yourself," begged Mrs. Scrase, now holding his hand in both of hers.

"Yuss, mum. Yuss, you bet."

"And now, mum——" this was Mrs. Wylie, whose sympathy was still flowing richly. Her husband had done his part and been a credit to her and she could take the centre of the stage—"I expect you'd like us to leave you to it. You'd rather be alone together, wouldn't yer? Of course yer would! I know what your feelin's must be, and strangers *is* such a nuisance at a time like this."

She stood up; and Joe picked up the cap which he had laid on the floor.

"Thank you," said Mrs. Scrase. "You are very understanding."

"Ow yes, mum, I understand. If I've said it once, I've said it a thah'sand times, I've said: 'If I ehta hear that my Jow's gawn west, I only arsts to be told that he died bravely, and then to be left alone with me sorrer and me pride.'"

Mrs. Scrase wept softly; and Mrs. Wylie turned to her husband: "Jow, come on. . . ."

"Yuss," said Joe.

"*Good-bye*, mum; *good-bye*, sir," Mrs. Wylie gushed. "Gawd bless yer. And down you worry about comin' to the door with us. We can find our way out and jest go quietly."

"Yuss," said Joe.

But Mrs. Scrase touched a bell, saying, "A servant will show you out."

"Ow, I see." Mrs. Wylie corrected her interpretations. "Yuss."

And they waited for the servant, who appeared and shepherded them away.

Kit Scrase's father and mother were left alone. They stood looking at each other for a moment, and then, on the same impulse, embraced. When they had parted from the embrace, the Alderman returned to his chair and lit himself a cigar and blew his clouds of smoke into the air. And his wife went to her seat on the sofa and lifted some incomplete sewing out of her little work-table and got on with it. But she laid it down that she might look into the fire, while her husband continued to blow smoke into the air.

CHAPTER XI

WAITING FOR MARCH

THE battalion was marching through the night from La Panne to Nieuport; and at the head of C Company marched its new commanding officer, Captain O'Grogan, D.S.O., sole survivor of the officers it had known. He led one hundred and twenty men along the level road that wound its way between the Dutch poplars, under the autumn stars. Of these less than twenty had seen Ypres and Railway Wood and dredged the bogs of the Salient; all the others were men of a new draft which had been attached to him at La Panne, a heterogeneous mob collected from every part of Britain—Welshmen and Jocks and weeded-out munition workers from Midland factories—not the men of East London and Romford and Thamesmouth who had given its peculiar character to the 15th Royal West Essex before it went to die in the Passchendaele mud. The old battalion was dead; long live the new battalion. One would try to be loyal to it, but one might be forgiven if one's love stayed behind with the old dead king.

So as he marched along at the head of his unfamiliar men, Tony was thinking of Harold and Aylwin and Hughes Anson; and of Webster and Sparrow and Sergeant Stott. And of Scrase too—but of Scrase not much nor clearly; for his thoughts, when they turned that way, seemed abruptly to stand still and to stare, benumbed and impotent.

Rosy Hughes, Childe Harold, Aylwyn: he knew naught of their passing. They had just disappeared; that was all. He had seen the last of them when he wished them good luck at the door of Railway Wood, and now they were not in their places as the battalion marched along; that was all. The "Fall in" had sounded along the sea wall of La Panne, and many men had paraded, but not these.

Curious how simple and how quiet their departure! In front there, just behind the rumps of Colonel Tappiter's horse, a mounted stranger led Rosy's men in column of fours—at least he led a remnant of them, for the greater number had followed their merry laughing captain, with his stolen rum aglow in their stomachs, over the last parapet of all—as they had followed him, laughingly and admiringly, over many another hazardous ridge before. Rosy and your men, where are you raiding now? Tony, as he offered this question to the night, imagined a momentary return of Hughes Anson: he saw his tall wide shape looming out of the darkness into which he had gone, and his merry face recognizing Tony, who peered over the parapet: "Hallo, Bungay!" he calls. "It was a good war."

Childe Harold. His voice, lifted in schoolboy impudence, would not be heard when they arrived at Company Headquarters in Nieuport, nor Aylwin's authoritative jabber about the new sector and the real significance of their move. A young subaltern called Arnold and another called Copeman would speak with Tony there, and who and what were they? Oh, no doubt in every way they were fellows as sound and as attractive and amusing as his companions of yesterday, and he was wrong in thinking them dull substitutes; but so they were to him, and so they would be for some time yet. And they wanted to be so friendly! Good fellows, they treated him, their new O.C., with such respect! Well, he would meet them gaily. Cheerio, Arnold! not too bad a march, was it? Tired, Copeman? Oh, you'll soon get used to it. Have a spot of the best. . . . *What?* What did you say? . . . Sorry, old man; I was thinking of something else. There are ghosts behind your seats, where they hoped themselves to sit.

And then old Moulden. Ha, God rest him merry! The very fact that he could think of him as "old Moulden" showed that all the former hate had died and something like affection was blossoming over its grave. Pshaw! What fools we were, you and I, old Moulden, to hate and revile each other when we might have known that any hour would close your story or mine! A tough composition this human nature of ours, persisting in the pettiest spites and envies right up to the guns of the Hindenburg Line. It was all so silly, and we realized that it was silly, and yet we were powerless to get shut of it. Good-bye, old Moulden. Somehow to-night you seem no

less worthy than Rosy and Kit Scrase and the Childe. Death has lifted you all to one level. I can see no ups and downs on the sky-line over which you passed out of sight.

Coxyde. . . . Oost Dunkerque. Now at last I am on the actual cobbles which I trod eight years ago with Frank Doyly when we were talking of nothing else than this war. 1910, and we were walking south, then, from Nieupoort to Oost Dunkerque; now it is 1917, and I am walking the opposite way and alone, for Frank has gone the way of the great majority; he actually received his bullet only a few miles from here. One ought to be appalled at the strangeness of the coincidence; but one isn't; one has ceased to wonder at anything strange. Yes, I remember these trees by the side of the road, and the flat meadows; and there, of course, is the narrow-gauge line of the Chemins de Fer Vicinaux—the devil! I had forgotten it. O Frank, Frank; under all our gunpowder talk that sunny afternoon I was indulging the pleasant fancy that I would make you the friend of my life; and I never saw you again! But I know you remembered that gaudy talk, and thought of it, when you came this way with your regiment. Coming back here to die—it really was a pretty coincidence! And here I come in my turn. Perhaps I am destined to die here too. Perhaps Time is a lie, and the Future was walking beside us that sunny afternoon. Perhaps the road beneath our feet, unblinkered by our human sense of time, was wiser than we, and knew.

And I was thinking of a life-long friendship with you! How cynically the gods jest with us! We hunger for an enduring friendship, and nothing endures but our loneliness. Nothing. Nothing. Even a wife or a sister recedes from us sooner or later; and as for our friends, they are with us for a lively hour, and then they go. What a procession they are as they touch us in passing and disappear! There was little Wavers at my prep-school, and old Raking at St. Paul's, and Sybil Chandry at Grandelmere, and you, Frank, one summer here in Belgium; and there was Wilmington on the ship, and Rosy Hughes and Kit Scrase. And others are coming, and what will be the good of them? they will only go.

Tramp, tramp, tramp of soldiers wearied into silence.

Nothing is stable; nothing permanent—unless Peggy's right and we can hold fast to God. Let's think a bit: is not the very completeness of our solitude an evidence for God? All

our nature reels back from anything so meaningless and merciless as a world without Him. At least mine does. . . . Is faith coming to me? . . . If so, I know what I shall do. Ah yes . . . yes; and it would be rather wonderful. Hasn't something been prompting me towards it all my life? Out of my balked affections hasn't there grown in me, ever strengthening, a love for all men everywhere, and a great pain of pity for them, till now it is restless to escape in ministration? Oh, could I but add to this a love of God, my road would be clear. . . . Will it come, this one thing needful, I wonder?

And a flush of delight seemed to irradiate his mind as he pictured for himself the happy, the blessed, life of a priest. . . . But he didn't know if so serene a lot would ever be his; and he couldn't think it out now, plodding on to Nieuport.

At Nieuport there was a very cheery member of C Company's mess, in the cellar among the rubble: Captain O'Grogan. His new subalterns, Arnold, Copeman and McRae, were jokers all; and he laughed with them as heartily as the next man, and sometimes when cynicism ruled the conversation, would offer a remark that beat their best.

So Captain O'Grogan now. From his manner none of his brother officers could have guessed that a fixed sadness preyed on him by day, and a visiting fear haunted him at night. If he was abstracted sometimes, they held that he was composing poetry. It was whispered that he did this thing.

And damn: these subalterns of his among themselves called him "the old man"! He became aware that a new and gayer generation had appeared in the war, and that he belonged to the old.

He was only twenty-nine.

Captain O'Grogan's fear was not a fear of pain or of death, but of himself. A shapeless, nameless fear that eluded the net of descriptive words: a fear lest he failed terribly when ordered again to lead an attack—lest he became like Scrase—lest his will were slowly atrophied by a corroding intellectual despair; and then a fear of this fear itself. A bomb tossed into a pill-box at Passchendaele had broken up the surface of his mind; and Kit Scrase, dying, had left a seed in the broken soil as a legacy for his friend.

It was winter now, and very quiet up at Nieuport ; but the attack was coming in March. By Christmas everyone knew that the Germans would launch in the early spring their greatest offensive. In front of the Allies, and especially in front of the British, they were banking up such a storm as had never before been let loose in the history of war. Their troop trains were chunking across Central Europe from Russia to France, bringing all the divisions released by the collapse of Russia and Rumania ; innumerable guns were being parked at the railway junctions ready for transit at the right hour to the right place ; and General von Hutier had appeared in the West. British aeroplanes, flying over the German lines at night and dropping flares to illuminate the roads, reported labour gangs at work everywhere, and a streaming motor traffic, and dense columns of marching men.

The storm would break with sixty divisions hurled on a front held by some twenty, and with three thousand guns facing twelve hundred—so British Intelligence said, and British Intelligence was wonderfully efficient just now, knowing in very fact almost as much about the coming offensive as Ludendorff himself. The Somme area would be Ludendorff's choice of a battle-ground, they said, and March his hour. They did not say these things aloud, but rumour after rumour brought the whisper of them to the 15th at Nieuport. And only a fool—such as was not to be found in the Royal West Essex—could have failed to detect in the newspapers arriving from England the suspense and the preparations among the knowledgeable persons there. What was the meaning of these Cabinet Ministers' speeches, if not a preparing of the people for a stern ordeal, and a stiffening of their courage ? " Our line may be bent," one of them had said frankly, " but it must not break."

So the winter unfolded itself as a waiting for March. And the Essex waited at Nieuport. The trench line before Nieuport seemed a street of luxurious residences after the shell-holes and ditches of Passchendaele. It was a French-made system of trenches zigzagging to left and right of that Yser bridge, which, seven years before, Tony had crossed with Frank Doyly, talking of the coming war. It fascinated him to look over his parados at night and wait for an enemy searchlight to illuminate the piers of the bridge, and then to remember that years before on a holiday tramp

he had come towards it bringing such a conversation, and never knowing that the belt of pasture and trees on either side of him would be his No-Man's Land. In the daylight he could see, rising up from the flat country behind the Germans, the ruins of Westende and Middelkerke, through which he and his friend had passed on that lively day.

When they were back in reserve they spent the nights among the farm-lands, building concrete pill-boxes against the threat of March; and in the last darkness before daylight they would foot-slog wearily back, to be met halfway by Padre Quickshaw and the travelling Soup Kitchen which he had contrived out of an old motor van and called "H.M.S.-K. *Mulligatawny*." *Mulligatawny* had been three times riddled with shell splinters and bore three golden wound-stripes on her flank.

Tony preferred the nights when he worked to the nights when he slept. Oddly enough, his sleep in daylight was always deep and refreshing. It was only when he took to his wire-netting bed at eleven or twelve at night that he lay down with a dread of being started awake, in the small-hour darkness, by his dream of the Booted Feet.

Why this dream was certain to jump him awake, with a forehead chilling under a creeping sweat and a heart either pulsing at a sickly pace or experimenting with a total stoppage, it passed his wit to understand; for it was not a very terrible dream. He could not remember when it had begun to visit him. But its origin was easily explained. He had seen so many hundreds of men sewn up in their blankets with their boots uncovered, or laid against a trench wall with ground-sheets covering their faces and bodies but not their feet, that the sight of upturned boots with hobnailed soles had got on his nerves. So much so that those upturned soles would come unsought before his mind's eye, as he read his novel or wrote a lively letter home. A reasonless dislike was growing in him of any pair of booted feet whose toes turned upwards, even though they belonged to a living man asleep. Empty boots, too, if they had been thrown down upon their backs and lay at a dead man's angles, could give him the same nasty turn. And at night his dream came—always in the same form: he was cutting himself a dug-out in the side of a ravine on Gallipoli, and as his pick pierced the ground, the earth fell away in great cakes; he was working very fast and he had nearly shaped for himself a little

square subterranean room, far below the roots of the scrub, when one heave of his pick brought down a large block of earth and disclosed a pair of booted feet, with the soles upturned and the pattern of the hobnails showing. At that he awoke with a start.

One night this dream passed from his opened eyes and left a heart-failure so unwarrantable that he jumped out of bed, determined to walk up and down with the nameless shuddering and probe it to its source. The booted feet seemed to have nothing much to do with it. What *was* his trouble?

"I fear *what*? I suppose I fear that, when the time comes, I shall go the same way as Kit. But why? Because I know that I am in danger of believing no longer in nations and in patriotism; nor in their war, but in all the things which are its very opposite: how then can I go on with it when the time comes to shoot again?

"I *must* find a sufficient cause for going on. That is all I want, a sufficient cause for going on, lest my will break in pieces and I become unable to drive myself against myself.

"A sufficient cause? Well, we're *in* the war; there's no dodging it; if one by one we abandon it, we shall let the Germans win, and do I want that? No. No, because I still believe that, though the hands of neither side may be perfectly clean, the British leaders led their people into the war with nobler motives than their enemies did; and that, though the terrible deeds into which it is driving us may be a travesty of the simple kindliness of the German people, they are a yet greater travesty of the kindliness of our own; and that, on the whole, it is better for the world that the German idea should collapse before the British than the British before the German.

"But what right have I to believe that; why dare I believe that? I *do* believe it, but why? I think the answer resides in the men and in the junior officers and in all the lower ranks of the army—who *are* the British people, after all.

"Just look at these men of mine. They come from London, Lancashire, Sussex, Glasgow, and they've all got the same mark on them, really. They are all the same humorous grousters whose humour is just so much stronger than their grouching—just so much, but just enough; the same joking, tolerant grumblers, with their tolerance always just the necessary bit larger than their grumbling. They just carry on, jesting and cursing and jesting again—and jesting most of all when things

are darkest. And during all the years I've known them I'll swear they've done ten deeds of good will for every deed of ill will. And they're all like that: just doing the job in front of them, and venting their anger over little things, so that they've no real malice against anyone; always much keener on giving their fags to their foes when they've got them as prisoners than on bayoneting them in their trenches; seldom excited to vengeance or hate, for the simple reason that they're incapable of seeing red unless someone's been bullying something—preferably an animal. Yes, when all is said and done, it *is* fair to say that while Germany stands to-day for a military spirit, which is the bankruptcy of humour and good nature, England stands for an unmilitary spirit, which is their triumph.

"And I'm with them, surely, surely. I can shoot for them, can't I? Yes, to me it seems that all the subtlest thinking in the world cannot escape old Tappiter's simple-hearted conclusion that, since we believed in the beginning that the war was worth while—and we *did* believe it—then we must see it through to its end."

Almost happy again, he got back into bed, and was soon asleep.

In February came the order to march south, to the threatened area of the Somme. They were to go into the Fifth Army; and the Fifth Army, as all knew, was the one the enemy was minded to annihilate. They went to places that Tony knew well—Courcelles, Gommecourt and Achiet-le-Petit; and then to Ruyaulcourt, Bertincourt and Ytres; and it amused him, who had supposed himself no longer careful of men's praise, to find that he could still draw a puerile satisfaction from airing the knowledge of a veteran before his subalterns. In these parts they dug and built and dug and built, by night and by day. Trenches yesterday; a redoubt to-day; and trenches to-morrow and to-morrow. They were digging, so they understood, the lines on to which the brigades in front would retreat after meeting the first onslaught. The nonchalant acceptance of an inevitable retreat shown by all the men down here, from colonels to privates, was a perpetual delight to Tony. They were justifying his faith. After four years of dull stalemate or balked offensives; after four winters

in rain and snow and frost; after being promised that each new "push" was to be the "Great Push" and the beginning of victory, here they stood, facing the biggest set-back of the war, and according it nothing but resigned shoulder-shrugs, comic grimaces and bitter chaff. He did not meet one who really supposed that it was the end of the war for them, though he met plenty who *said* it was—aye, and even said they hoped it was. But behind this acid talk he perceived the unspoken certainty that if they didn't defeat the Germans this year, they'd do it before another ten years had passed. As they had phrased it for a long time now—and the words were as near as they could bring themselves to expressing so vulgar a certainty: "The first seven years are bound to be the worst."

"Champion little trenches, these that we're making for Fritz. They're for 'im t'occupy, tha knows," said the North of England, at labour in Picardy. "Eh, boot we'll mak 'em comfortable for 'im, and all."

"Not 'arf!" answered the South. "Myke 'em restful, like. 'E'll be that tired, poor b——, the way we'll make 'im run after us. And I tell you this, mate: he'll have to leg it like a good 'un, if he's going to catch *me*. I shall be for Ay-miens."

"Och, but these wee trenches'll nae be big enough to hold all the Boches that's coming," said Scotland. "They're no for that, you block; they're just to bury a few thousand of you in, while the others hop it to Ay-miens. Did you think Jerry was going to stop here? Ach, to hell! will he? He'll tak this wee patch in the first five minutes."

"Well, I 'ope it keeps fine for 'im," was the final comment of the South.

And the officers: when the First of March broke over Picardy, they said, "Happy new month, O'Grogan. Oh, to be in England, now that March is here!"

March the 21st. The day was suspected, and the hour: dawn on the 21st. And as March grew into her teens, bless her, the junior officers of the 15th debated long and often whether they would be in the thinly-held forward line at three o'clock ac emma on March 21st; or in support; or in reserve. And all wanted to wager that they'd be somewhere behind, because, said they, if they staked a quid or two on being in front and won the bet, they wouldn't be alive, unfortunately, to pocket the takings.

The darkening afternoon of the 20th found them still behind : and they met one another with : "Looks good, my boy ! No orders to move yet. Looks good !" "Quite ; what's wrong with getting down to it early to-night ? We'll want to be in good condition to run like hell to-morrow." "Quite ; and we've got to stand-to from about three o'clock onwards, blast it !" They wrote letters ; they made wills (secretly) if they had not done so before ; maybe they prayed, but in their beds and silently, because all would rather be condemned by God to their eternal punishment than be seen by another Englishman on their knees. Tony's officers, Arnold, Copeman and McRae, being new men and without experience of a grand-scale offensive, were strained more with excitement than with fear ; though they pretended like the whole British Army to "colossal wind-up" ; and as for young Carder, who had joined but three days before, he was alight with happiness.

Carder was a nineteen-year-old boy, fresh from a few months at Sandhurst, and his fair oval head was equipped with exactly the same mental furniture as the late Childe Harold's, but his body was very different from that young giant's, being slight and wiry. To-night he was as restless and impatient as a child before the curtain runs up on a pantomime ; and he spent the hours before bed aiming his uncocked revolver at imaginary Germans and saying, "*Click !* That's made his nose bleed, Copeman. *Click !* That's given him a nasty headache, Arnold. *Click !* Got him right in the tummy ! That's got mixed up with his sauer-kraut and sausage, sir. *Click !* That's gone splash in his lager."

"Someone put that child to bed," said Tony, at last. He had been marvelling at Carder's youthfulness, with its priceless gift of insensitiveness to the reality of war. It was a youthfulness which he had lost.

"Ain't gwine to bed to-night," Carder retorted, and took aim, and slew another German just by the window.

"Yes, you are," said the O.C. "Be a good little boy : there's a party to-morrow, and we can't have you feeling half-asleep all the time. You won't enjoy it."

"Oh, won't I, sir ?"

"No, not if you get worked up like this ; you'll turn feverish or be sick or something ; and have to go to bed. And that'd be a pity, because there are going to be some nice games."

"*Yem !*" Arnold nodded. "General Post."

"Hide and Seek," grunted Copeman.

"Exactly!" Tony agreed. "So go to bed, infant."

"Dow wanna," pouted the infant. "*Click!* That's made a nasty mess of his spectacles——"

"Oh hell! no more of that!" Tony protested. "Come, it's ten o'clock; you know you can't be used to sitting up as late as this. Get a few hours' sleep, or you'll have no wind to-morrow."

"*I've* got wind all right," said Arnold.

"I can spare him some too, if he's short," muttered Copeman.

"But I don't quite get you, gentlemen." Carder looked at them innocently. "What for should I want wind!"

"For the races, my son," Tony explained. "These Boches can run. And we've only got a few yards' start."

"They *shall* run," announced Carder. "*Click!* There's one hareing for Berlin. *Click!* That's got him in the buttocks——"

"Oh, *do* dry up," pleaded Tony, suddenly irritable. And he got up and walked to the door of the mess.

Carder looked at Arnold with what was meant to be humorous alarm, and from Arnold to Copeman, and from Copeman back to Arnold, as if he would say, "Did you see that? He went all nasty, didn't he? Funny old Skipper!" and then, whistling the air of a song of his schooldays: "Father's got 'em, Father's got 'em, Father's got 'em coming on again," he sauntered away to bed. Tony meanwhile was looking out at the night. It was uncannily quiet, and very cold.

At midnight he had made no attempt to go to bed, though Arnold and McRae had pulled off boots and jackets and dosed down for an hour or two, and Copeman was out with the men. He looked at his wrist-watch. One minute to twelve. . . . One minute past. Time had crossed over from March 20th to March 21st. It was rather like seeing the new year in.

Then sitting on a box with elbows on knees and fingers interlocked and head bent forward, while time ticked on. . . . The telephone buzzed. "Yes, who is it?"

It was the Adjutant, just making sure that all the lines were in order. "O.K.? Thanks. . . . How are you, old man? . . . All serene. . . . Good; chin chin."

"Wait a minute—I say, is it certain he's coming?"

"Who?"

"*Him.*"

"*Sb!* yes. Absolutely. We learnt it definitely to-night. He'll be here bright and early."

"Right. Well, so long."

"Cheerio. All the best."

Angry guns to the south. Hallo, hallo, what were they? It couldn't be the bombardment yet; it was only half-past two. No, it must be some raid or other; some wretched doomed battalion snatching eleventh-hour information.

Three o'clock, and the silence was intense.

Four o'clock: and now indeed his heart began to thump. Any moment now. . . .

CHAPTER XII

MARCH

AT what moment it began he never remembered. It was down upon them with such power and weight, and such uproar, that coherence was bullied out of thought. Nor was he able to formulate all that happened in the next hours, under that deafening bombardment and behind the blanketing mist. Memory cannot give form and pattern to a *mêlée* whose essence is chaos. Besides, most of it happened beyond the sweat-dimmed windows of his gas-mask, for the ground-vapour outside was one devil's cocktail dashed through with mustard gas, tear gas, and phosgene. Copeman was killed at some point in the day. Brigade Headquarters was early lost, for all communications had "gone west," and heaven knew when Brigade, in the literal sense, went west too. Runners had been sent out; but few ever returned. Rumours poured up: the whole of their right had been driven in; the other battalions of the brigade, which had been in the forward line and in reserve, had taken the full knock and disintegrated; themselves, though they were only in support, were in danger of being cut off because the enemy were already west of them. Brigade had gone; Division was going; Corps was packing up. Well! If Corps, miles back in the lands of peace, didn't think they were safe—good God, what of us?

There was a day and a night of this; and in the morning Colonel Tappiter himself appeared, affecting a perfect calm. "All right. Pull out, O'Grogan."

They pulled out—"All present and correct, sir. . . . 'Shun! Slope *b'upp*! Form fours! Right! By the right, quick march!"—and now they were marching. Marching all day, west by north. They seemed to be leaving the crepitation of the battle a long way behind the horizon, in the east and south.

A few slow shells came swimming after them, and Joe Wylie, looking up towards their hesitating sigh, called out, "Them's the blokes with their carpet slippers on." At many a cross-roads they halted to let the battalions of unknown divisions go streaming by with all their transport. These, too, had pulled out. At dark they were beyond the old Bapaume-Albert road and seemed to have set their faces towards Arras.

"Gaw! it's Calais we're going to," shouted Joe. "The C.O.'s takin' us 'ome. He's fed oop."

They lay down on the grass by the side of the road, and became a long line of twinkling cigarettes, before they rolled their overcoats around them and tried to sleep. All night it seemed to those who were wakeful that the unknown battalions went pouring by with their voices and their rumbling wheels; and that, if one opened one's eyes, one saw always that stationary light, enhaloed in the mist, where Colonel Tappiter and the Adjutant stood by a hurricane lantern hung on the mess float, and discoursed with each other, or Colonel Tappiter put up his spectacles and studied a map, or the Adjutant shouted further instructions to a running orderly.

Long before daylight they were paraded to march again—"All present and correct, sir. . . . By the right, quick march!"—and they were marching through the mist. Once when the mist opened for a little they knew by a reading of the stars that they were marching south.

"Blimey!" cried Joe. "If we go on this way, we shall meet the bleedin' war again."

After two hours, and in daylight, they struck a main road. And there such a day began for them as should have broken their faith for ever, and did, in fact, make even the best of them mutter, "Well, if this isn't the end, I don't know what is! Reckon the old war's finished now." For, as they marched in good order, Colonel Tappiter cantering back and forth along their ranks with a vigilant and sultry eye dropping down on their faces, an army in rout flowed with them—only faster than they, as the mid-stream water flows faster than the water under the bank. The disciplined battalions had gone down during the night: these were remnants, stragglers: men of all units—gunners in riding boots, infantry men in puttees, Jocks in kilts; some with all their equipment on their backs, some without rifle or pack, which they had thrown away; solitary officers and officers with half a dozen men;

Walking Wounded with jackets or sleeves slit open and arms or breasts bound up ; lorries packed with cheering men who seemed to be playing at old-style firemen ; lorries dragging eighteen-pounders behind them ; G.S. wagons loaded with a merry crowd like old-fashioned breaks on holiday ; ambulances which took the centre of the road and were granted this right by all, even though Authority had perished in a night and Rout was in command.

Tony saw one sergeant who was leading some six or seven men in single file, hail a lorry piled with S.A.A. boxes : " Hi ! where are you going ? "

" Me, chum ? " answered the driver. " I'm going to git aht of this mob if I can and make for St. Omer. Ay-miens is *for* it. Boss told me to pull this lot out any old where."

" Well, you can bloody well take us," said the sergeant. " Last thing my officer said to me was : ' Look after yerselves, sergeant. Try and fetch up in some town and attach yerselves to whoever'll 'ave yer.' "

" Come on, then, blast yer," said the driver ; and they clambered aboard.

And all the while the 15th Royal West Essex tramped on in good order : grumbling as the day wore on and their feet wore out ; cursing the Colonel ; swearing that if the old s—— tried to sacrifice them all when it was no bloody good, they'd see him in hell first ; silencing as he trotted past them, dropping his vigilant eye. Now and then Joe Wylie enlivened the day with an appropriate song : " I wonder why I sometimes sigh the way I do." Tony, though he had no horse, played the same game with his company as the Colonel played with the battalion ; every fifteen minutes or so he left his place in front of them and walked down their ranks and up again, rating some, encouraging others. He felt particularly sorry for little Carder, so new to war, who was trudging along at the rear of the company ; but always the boy looked up at him with a smile. Once Tony walked as far as the back of the battalion, and he saw Quickshaw trudging along with the Quartermaster—Quickshaw, in a belted trench-coat, his protruding eyes staring abstractedly ahead, his tin hat pushed back, and a rifle slung on his shoulder.

" Hullo, old padre," he greeted him. " Where have you sprung from ? "

" Ask me another," said Quickshaw. " I was up in the line

with the 13th when we all vamoosed, and as I couldn't find Brigade anywhere—if you ask me, they'd flitted half an hour before—I decided to look after meself. I don't know where I got to last night, but this morning I scrounged a lift on a mess float, and as we were streaking down the road (we came pretty fast, I can tell you! *I* saw to that), I recognized old Tappiter at once and hopped off to join you. Your crowd's about the only unit in the Brigade that's intact, I fancy. They always were the best push of the lot."

"Oh, I don't know; we didn't cop it like the others," said Tony, deprecating this praise. "We were behind."

"Yes, that's true," Quickshaw allowed, rather ashamed, perhaps, of what must have sounded like flattery, and glad to remember that there was no justification for it. "And the others got it in the neck. They were quite right to do a guy—those who were alive. *I* did, *you* bet yer boots."

"Well, we're glad to see you, padre."

"Yes, you'll have to feed me now," said Quickshaw, unsmiling. "I've put myself on your ration strength."

"Delighted, delighted. But what are you carrying a rifle for? Have you turned combatant in these strenuous times?"

"Nope! I'm carrying it for one of these lads in front, who's just about done to the wide. Old Tappiter strafed me to blazes for doing it last time he was good enough to pay us a visit, and ordered me to return it to the fellow. Which I did, but I took it back again as soon as he was out of sight; and now I'm keeping my eyes skinned for his next appearance—when the lad can carry it again for a minute or two."

"H'm," mumbled Tony doubtfully.

"Oh, it's all right. Don't you worry," Quickshaw explained.

"Tappiter made his point, which was all he wanted. He can't officially give his consent to one man carrying less than another but he's probably quite satisfied that it should be done, so long as we don't let him see it. *I* know him. . . . Not, mind you, that I shan't pick up a rifle—there are plenty lying about—and use it if any blasted Hun tries to shoot *me*."

"Oh no, padre," Tony rebuked. "Oh no. Hague Convention—Geneva Convention—or whatever it is!"

"Geneva be blowed! He'll have busted it first if he attacks me."

"Oh no, padre," repeated Tony. "You shouldn't have said that. I'm afraid I shall have to report you."

"Report me as much as you like. *I* don't care. I'm quite ready to be cashiered. I'm thinking about cashiering myself before I'm much older. I'm just about through with it all. If at the end of four years we can't do any better than this, well, I'm not going to waste any more of my life with such a rag-time army. It makes me want to puke. My Church Lads' Brigade at home are better than this, and *they're* poisonous enough, God knows."

Tony cocked his head towards the traffic rioting by on the left. "What do you think of that?" he asked.

"Damn awful," answered Quickshaw laconically.

"But we're still winning, I suppose?"

"Oh, no doubt, no doubt," assured the padre. "But our advance isn't timed for a few years yet. It's due somewhere in 1930, and *I* shan't be here then, thank God."

"No. . . . Well, good-bye, padre. *Ora pro nobis.*"

For the first time Quickshaw grinned.

"Yes, and you need it," he hurled after Tony's retreating figure.

Another night they slept by the roadside, spreading their ground-sheets on the dewy grass; and in the misty dawn continued their march. By noon of this day they were out of the wasted Somme lands and among the inhabited villages. There were two streams in the river of traffic now, for the fleeing civilians were pouring along with the soldiers, a dark stream beside and amid the khaki: they poured along, each family with its cart or barrow creaking under mattresses and furniture, and towing belike a horse or cow or dog; on foot they came, on bicycle, on horseback, on cowback; old men in blue blouses and peaked caps; old and young women in black skirts, black shawls and *en cheveux*; and children in assorted rags who either clutched their mothers' hands and aprons, weeping aloud, or ran with laughter, like playful dogs, by the side of the great recession.

At one cross-roads the river was banked and dammed by a transverse stream of traffic through which, after a halt seething with curses, it forced its way and flowed on. At another cross-roads it passed a Staff Officer who stood by a notice board, "STRAGGLERS THIS WAY," and diverted some of its waters out of the main flow.

A few of the refugees made common cause with the soldiers and were friendly; others spat and hissed, "*Poltrons!*

. . . *Sales bêtes !* " Tony, walking for the nonce with Quickshaw, never took a nastier wound than when a comely peasant girl, who was bumping behind her father on a farm horse, stared into his eyes and spat out, "*Anglais ! Pfl . . . Poltrons !* "

"*Non, non !* " he tried, feebly ; and Quickshaw, whose eyes had shot fire, spat back, "*Poltrons* yourself, and ten times over ! Yes, and with knobs on ! " for Quickshaw's style, under provocation, always went to pieces and he could do nothing but explode like a schoolboy's " jumping cracker " and like a damp one, too.

Neither protest had been of any use, for the girl was gone. And the wound in Tony cried after her, " Oh, why can't you understand ? Oh, why can't you understand ? "

At one time when the half-light of early evening was deepening into night, their road tilted on to higher ground, and he looked away to the left where the bruit of battle still grumbled and shuddered along the sky ; and everywhere he saw the glare of small conflagrations : it was the dumps burning. And here McRae and two of his men were killed, and a young corporal wounded. Before they knew what was happening, the battle was in the sky above their heads : a huge Gotha, ringed round with a guard of smaller aeroplanes, was sailing above the shrapnel and high explosive, and *crash ! crash !* the bombs were dropping on the retreating army. One fell in the pasture by the side of C Company, and four men died : three Englishmen and an old Picardy greybeard. Women wailed. Quickshaw stopped and went to the fallen men ; and Colonel Tappiter cantered up on his horse, after shouting at the battalion, " Get on, can't you ! What the devil are you stopping for ? March properly there, damn you ! Cover off properly there ! " The doctor pronounced the three men dead, but the corporal's wound unimportant—just a splinter in the shoulder. The Colonel, controlling his nervous horse, frowned down upon the misadventure ; but before he could speak, Quickshaw had spoken :

" Look here, sir. I'll stand by this little lot. You and the doctor'd better get on. I'll see that these three are buried, and I'll get the corporal in somehow. You can walk, can't yer ? " he inquired of the corporal, snappily, as if the man was in some way an offender.

" Yes, sir," said the corporal. " It's nothing."

" No. . . . Well, I'll get him in, sir. I'll either stop the

first ambulance or walk him along. You leave it to me, sir. You hurry on and save Amiens; it looks as though it's *for* it all right. And *I'll* see that we're not taken by the Germans—you can wager your life on that, haw! haw!"

"Well, that's decent of you, padre," mumbled the Colonel, plainly anxious to get on.

"Oh, no, no," Quickshaw demurred uncomfortably. "Glad to have been some damned use to someone."

Those were the last words that Tony heard from Quickshaw during the years of war, and a minute later he saw the last of him. The road had dipped and curved, and he turned round and saw Quickshaw standing above his three dead men, with his hands in the pockets of his trench-coat, a cigarette drooping from his mouth, and his goggle-eyes gazing at the uneasy ribbon of light which pulsated in the eastern sky. A few more steps, and he had left this view of Quickshaw behind the bend; nor was he destined to find him again; though the padre survived and is alive at this hour.

The battalion went on, silent now and footsore. Where they were going to, the Colonel and the Adjutant knew, but none else. A long way south it must be, because they were passing columns of French soldiers in their sky-blue coats, who were marching the opposite way, towards the shattered front of the British Fifth Army. These Frenchmen glowered at them and muttered. A lorry, piled with ration boxes, racketed by them, hurrying towards Amiens; and Colonel Tappiter, perceiving what it was, galloped after it and stopped it almost at pistol-point. Astride his horse, and his horse astride the road, he looked exactly like a high-wayman in commission. Sharply he ordered his braves to unload enough rations for all the men; signed a receipt for them; gave it to the driver; and bade him get on. Over the cups of tea which the officers drank together he said little; if he knew anything about the fate of the rest of the brigade, he remained secretive about it; he said only, when he gave the order to march again, "We shall stand somewhere."

They stood at Grandpré about a week later.

In the meantime they had been sent to many places and many tasks. One night they were split into companies and sent to

stiffen a miscellaneous throng—stragglers, labour companies, dismounted cavalry, convalescents from the hospitals, and prisoners out of the cages—which had been hurriedly organized and thrown into a gaping fracture of the line. But no attack developed here, thank God: the battle roared to the south. They were drawn from this World's Fair (as they called it) and sent south again—always south—for the threat dropped south and south as the resistance, tightening in the north, forced it downwards like the bulge in a water-skin. And here for two days and nights they laboured unrestingly on an old French trench-system, lifting off the counterpane of grass and flowers which the years had woven over it, and finding, as the easy silt guided their picks, the whole outline of bays, traverses, saps and dug-outs, even as the explorers found the ground-plan of Troy under its tumulus of earth. But they never fought in this system: southward the line cracked and opened again; and they “pulled out”; and the day following was the second day of the battle all over again—they were marching west with a retreating army; marching all day, and in the evening light passing lorry-loads of French soldiers who were being rattled up to the points of danger.

These were livelier fellows than those of a week before, who had looked moody and contemptuous; they knew, these fellows, that the German spate, though rolling onwards, was not rolling fast enough, and that the English, though they had broken under a weight which no army in the world could have supported, were reforming in front of it, not seriously perturbed, and entirely unresponsive to the idea that it had beaten them; and that if, as seemed certain now, it would be held at last, then the war was well-nigh over, because the Germans could do no more, whereas the Allies were full of strength—were not the ships unloading America at the ports?—and so these hearty poilus waved their hands as they rattled by, and yelled “*On les aura !*” and “*Ils ne passeront pas !*” and when the English tommies only grinned uncomfortably at such disturbing heroics, roared after them, “Eets a long vay to Teeperah’ry,” which they were firmly convinced was the marching song of the British—so little they knew them. At ten o’clock the 15th dragged themselves, dog-weary, into the township of Grandpré.

They found it deserted: the last of its civil population had

gone while the daylight blessed their going, and there was not a soul in the streets; not a dog. Only the cats sat on the thresholds before the locked doors or on the *trottoirs* beneath the shuttered windows, waiting for them to open again. For every door was tight closed and every shutter swung to: the peasants, shopkeepers and small *rentiers*, thrifty and tenacious to the last, had taken all the possessions they could carry and turned their keys on the rest, to keep out, *tu sais*, either German foes or English friends. "One can hope, *n'est ce pas?*" "*Mais oui, mais oui. Allons.*"

But not a hope for their houses when the 15th Royal West Essex entered, their knees breaking with fatigue and their feet dragging. Colonel Tappiter had ridden ahead with a billeting officer and found painted by the side of each door the number of troops the billet would hold—"Two Officers, Twelve Men"—"Five Officers, Fifty Other Ranks"—for a Town Major (now flown and reporting himself in Amiens) had been accommodating British battalions here during the last three years. The Colonel chose his headquarters, kicked open the door, and went in; and the billeting officer met the battalion by the Fleur-de-blé and parcelled it out among the houses of the main street, as the Colonel's tactical eye had instructed him, because it was just possible, Colonel Tappiter had said, "that we may have to put up a bit of a stand here." The doors were driven in, and the cats entered first with unmannerly haste, the foreign soldiers clattering after them.

Tony, Arnold and Carder found themselves in one of the larger houses, with the greater part of their men about them, in its rooms, cellars and outhouses; a few, however, had been herded into the dwellings beyond. It was a corner house standing where the Rue St. Roche met the main road. The three officers chose a room overlooking both roads; and there, after seeing to the welfare of the men and sharing a scratched-up meal which they were too tired to enjoy or finish, they flung themselves down for sleep. The room, though emptied of all its ornaments, had still its red plush horsehair sofas beloved of the provincial French; and these made quite comfortable beds for Tony and Arnold. Young Carder vowed that he preferred the floor and would leave the sofas to the old men; so he rolled the hearthrug round his haversack for a pillow, and, lying down, rested his cheek against it, saying, "This is fun."

Exhaustion kept sleep on the wrong side of their foreheads for some time, and they lay mute and inert, or they turned over and sighed and yawned, each supposing that the others had been more fortunate than he and had long ago "got off." Arnold was the first to find his way into sleep and to leave the others to their miseries: with a falling jaw, nasal breathing, and the attitude of a limp corpse which had been thrown face downward on the sofa, he slept; and his sleep insulted their wakefulness. Once Carder sat up, had a long look at him, and giggled; then lay down again, mumbling, "Damn! Thrice damn!" and tried to jerk himself into comfort as a child does. But Tony did not speak nor show that he had seen anything.

A few minutes later there was the rattle and clangour of lorries on the cobbles outside, and the shouts of separated voices, and the ringing beat of a cantered horse.

Carder, with a muttered "Oh hell!" scrambled up and tip-toed to the window.

"What is it?" asked Tony.

"More French going through."

"Which way?"

"Towards the Boche of course."

"Oh well. . . ." Tony sighed and shut his eyes again, to continue his pleading with sleep for its mercy.

"No," said Carder, abruptly leaving the window. "I can't look at it, O'Grogan. I don't like to see the Frenchies—on *our* lorries too—hurrying towards the Boche while we're hurrying away from them. They oughtn't to be thinking they can hold a line which we can't. It's bad for their souls."

"Oh, what does it matter?" sighed Tony.

"Matters a hell of a lot. This evening when they kept passing us on the road, I had to hang my head."

"Rot. They knew that we took the first shock, and that no one could possibly have stood it, and that we're being got out to reorganize."

"Do they? I hope so. Anyhow I hope they get it in the neck too."

"I don't."

"I do. It'll learn 'em to feel superior."

"Oh, go to sleep."

"Right-ho. But I say, O'Grogan, is it true that we're the

only battalion that hasn't disintegrated?" He sat down on the floor and adjusted his pillow.

"I don't know," answered Tony listlessly. "I can't worry about the others."

"Funny! I didn't expect the war'd be like this at all, at all. . . . What annoys me, O'Grogan, is that if only I'd stayed at Boulogne t'other day I might have waited for the Front to come to *me*. I'd have saved a devilishly uncomfortable journey in one of your troop trains, a hell of a walk up to the Line, and now this hell of an undignified walk back."

"Well, I'm sorry, Carder; but *I* can't help it. The Boche is properly through this time."

"But bother and oh dear, O'Grogan: is that strictly according to programme? I mean, we hammer at the Boche for four years, and at the end *he* breaks through, not us. . . . Of course, it's none of my business, but when I was fifteen I saw what a mess you fellows were making of it out here, so directly I was nineteen I came out to give you a lift—and here I am scurrying back in a most ungentlemanlike retreat."

"We shall reform and stop 'em somewhere, and then you can take matters in hand and improve 'em a bit—so now go to sleep."

"You don't think we're beaten?"

"Beaten! Gosh, no! . . ."

"Good. I feel glad about that on the whole. . . . Hello! . . . Listen!"

He had heard, and at no great distance away, the nervous rapid-fire of engaging infantry; first the mechanical gibber of Lewis guns or *mitrailleuses*; then a crackling and spluttering as when new coke is shot on to roaring flames; then a *rallentando* till the noise split up into the intermittent snapping of machine-guns; lastly the isolated whipcracks of a rifle, and silence.

Tony sat up.

"Close!" he said.

"Small-arm fire too," Carder hinted grimly.

They listened for a resurgence of the fire, but there was only the level thrumming of the night.

"If that was as near as it sounded," said Tony at last, "it means that they've driven back the French as well."

"Well, thank God for that!" said Carder.

Tony sat thinking for a long minute: then flung himself back for sleep. "I'm not worrying about it any more," he

complained. "We shall know when they tell us. And if they come, they come. Good-night."

"Good-night," answered Carder. . . . "But I rather hope they do come. I want to see a bit of scrapping now that I've come all this way."

"Oh, go to sleep."

Oh, if one could only go to sleep: one might awake then with nerves refreshed and this nameless apprehension allayed for a while. Not again could he build up from the bottom, and brick by brick, that citadel of rational argument wherein he had fortified himself against the mouthing ghosts without; he was too tired. He must have built it around him a score of times during his silent marching of the last few days; and always from the bottom again, brick by brick. If he failed, he failed; he had tried hard, and he could do no more. Oh, to sleep, to sleep! Surely he was nearly asleep now. Let him arrest all thinking, and then suddenly he would find that he had dropped asleep. Now: think of nothing. . . . One night at Nieuport—how long ago was it?—it must be over two months—he had worried through all the argument till he arrived at the certainty that he could kill for England and bid his soldiers shoot. "Go, bid the soldiers shoot"—where did that come from? Shakespeare certainly: he could see a stage and a helmeted prince standing above fallen figures and pointing with an outstretched arm: "Go, bid the soldiers shoot." Was it Henry V at Agincourt? Or Mark Antony on the field of Philippi? Or was it somewhere in Antony and Cleopatra—

"The barge she sat in, like a burnished throne,
Burned on the water: the poop was beaten gold——"

how did it go on?—oh, confound it, how did it go on? Something about "O'er-picturing that Venus, where we see The fancy out-work nature . . . O rare for Antony!" Himself and Honor in a boat on the river, with the old grey wall of Kew Gardens on one side and the tall trees of Brentford Eyot on the other; and the long stretch of the river empty, as it always was in the youth of the year. That was the day after their first meeting, and he had taken her on the river and kissed her under an overhanging branch, and quoted, "O rare for Antony!" How lovely had been that first touch of Honor's lips! What bright years they were, and how they

had stretched—just like the sunlit river itself that day—right up to the foot of the gathered storm! Would he ever see Honor again? Oh, get off that!—it played the devil with one's heart. . . . By what train of thought had he arrived at this picture of Honor and himself on the river? From *Antony and Cleopatra*, and that had come out of "Go, bid the soldiers shoot." Ah, of course, they were the last words of *Hamlet*. And that night in Nieuport he had, with careful thought, achieved the conviction that it was all right and he could go on and ought to go on; so there was no need now to marshal the argument again: it had been done once and that was enough. To sleep then. . . . And, oh thank God, he must be asleep now, because he was digging in the slope of Trolley Ravine on Gallipoli, and thinking how good to be on the old Peninsula again, and no longer in that room in Grandpré, France, waiting for the Germans to come. That was a bit of a horror, wasn't it? The wind in Trolley Ravine, touching one's cheeks, is an unspeakable relief. Now to get on with this dug-out. I'll tunnel till I'm well under the roots of the scrub, and then Joe Wylie shall wangle some pit props from the Sappers' Dump, and we'll make a home to be proud of. Carder can share it with me if he likes, and we'll pin up our photographs. Honor would be amused to think she was smiling down from the walls of such a rabbit burrow; and Carder's got a girl to hang opposite her, I'll be bound—poor kid, I hope he comes through all right. When I've finished, I'll bring Honor in to see this dug-out; and here in this darkness we'll kiss just as we did that day on the river. Funny that the thought of her lips can agitate one's body with delight and empty one's throat; it's all rather wonderful. Think of that day when all this is over and we meet on the platform again: that'll be a more wonderful embrace than that first kiss on the river. We shall lapse back again into a lower love, and sometimes be impatient with one another, but what matter? These moments show us what is possible between us. I want her. God, how I want her! I'm done—that's the truth of the matter; I'm *done*, and I want her. . . . But that's over; I'm out of that room now and back on Gallipoli, digging in Trolley Ravine. Why doesn't Joe Wylie come and give me a lift? We must finish this dug-out before the dark falls. Somehow Joe Wylie and the men are my justification for going on, but how, God knows, Doesn't matter, I'd decided that I wouldn't struggle through

that heavy argument again: it always makes my head ache, and there's so much pain mixed up with it. I'd better take the pick to this. . . . And now the shovel. . . . Pick again. . . . Slow, quiet work, and not unpleasant. How can that roof of earth stay up, now that I've tunnelled my way so far; there must be many tons of it ready to fall. But if it falls, it'll fall in chunks, and I can clamber out. So on again. Where's the pick? . . . No, don't have *that* wall down, there's something behind it; something horrible. *Don't*, I say! Oh, what are you doing? I said leave it, leave it, you fool! There, down she comes! Look, those are a man's boots. Oh come away, there's someone buried here. I *can't* come away—

Tony was awake and a grey light in the room told him that he must have slept till nearly dawn. His heart was pumping in the mad panic always induced by this dream; and he was waiting for it to quiet, and brushing his shirt sleeve along his dripping forehead, when a question leapt in his head, and, seated there, drove the heart faster: *was* someone mounting the stairs hurriedly and coming towards the door of the room? He could not move, but stared like a terrified child at the door. This sound of approaching footsteps, as it was more startling, so it was more quickly apprehended than the crepitation of rifle fire which trembled perpetually in the distance and now and then shook the window-frames of the room. The footsteps were running along the passage; the door-handle turned.

"Is Captain O'Grogan here?"

"Yes, what do you want?"

"Runner from H.Q., sir. A message."

"Bring it over."

His hand trembling, he lit a candle and held the message close to its flicker.

"Christ!"

He was on his feet, hurriedly initialling the message-form, and calling to Arnold and Carder, "Here! wake up, you fellows. . . . Arnold . . . Carder . . . wake up. They're through again."

The two other officers sat up blinking

"They're through," repeated Tony.

"Who? What?"

"On our right. The French are all going back that way."

"Well, thank God for that!" murmured Carder, sleepily.

"Don't be an ass. I've just had a message that we're to stay where we are and hold this place at all costs."

Now Carder jumped to his feet. "Oh good!"

"Good?" laughed Tony, who had not yet secured control of himself. "It'll probably be the end of you." And, coatless and hatless as he was, he rushed out to find the Company Sergeant-Major. Arnold and Carder laced up their breeches and whipped on their jackets and their boots, too excited to speak. Tony was quickly back.

"I've told the Sergeant to fall in the men and detail them to all the windows overlooking the road. The batmen and cooks are to take their places with the others. You, Carder——"

"Shan't have time to shave, shall we, boss?" asked Carder.

"God, no!"

"I've missed my shave five times in the last week," sighed the youth. "It really is the beginning of the end when the British Army gives up shaving."

"You haven't got anything to shave," said Tony, "and I don't suppose you ever will have now. Look here: one of you's got to report to the Colonel with the Lewis guns."

"Oh, let *me*," begged Carder.

"No, you stay here. Arnold, you go."

"Yes, sir."

Arnold was gone. Tony dressed himself with fingers that fumbled. There was a confused noise in the passage, and the men entered who would man the windows of the room. One of them was Joe Wylie.

"Gaw, is it a bit dangerous, sir?" asked Joe.

"Oh no, not a bit," snapped Tony sarcastically. "It amounts to selling your lives as dearly as possible, as the saying is; that's all."

"Oh, Gawd!"

Joe's expression—staring, frowning—revealed his effort to grasp this thought. One saw that the man's mind had peered into the face of death, and stepped back from it. It was better to be stunned than to see. "Lummy!" he added.

"Hurry up, Wylie. Get to your place," Tony ordered. "Open the windows, men; and knock out all the glass. We can't have splinters flying about. Two men to each window. Carder, come with me. You'll have to take command next door."

"Yes, sir."

They went out.

The soldiers having cleared the window-frames of all glass, rested their rifles on the sills, pointing them up the street, where daylight was brightening. Joe pretended to have difficulty with the bolt of his.

"Blazes!" he said, laughing; though something caught at his laugh and spoiled it, and his voice was unsteady. "'Ow do you work this thing? I ain't bin a pukka soldier for three years."

"You fire from the thin end, Joe," said one of the men.

"Do yer now? Crimes, I thought I was ah't of this sort of thing for good'an'all, but they seem determined to make poor old Joe fight." He arranged the rifle on the sill. "Nah then, Britain's Last Hope!"

A man from Lancashire spoke.

"Reckon we're *for* it all reet now, lads. T'message said we were to hold this shop at all costs. That means, 'No surrender,' tha knows. Puts the tin hat on us, any road."

"Oh shurrup, Bill!" Joe protested. "You'll be makin' me afryde soon. I ain't as strong-minded as you are." And since humming and talking were better than thinking, he looked into his store for an appropriate ditty and began: "Oh my, I don't want to die, I want to go home;" which led him by a natural transition to:

"Take me back to dear old Blighty,
Put me on the train for London Town,——"

and some of the men, infected by the tune, joined in with him, gently singing:

"Whoa! Highty-tiddley-igthy, hurry me home to Blighty:
Blighty is the place for me."

Here they stopped, both because it was the end of the song and because this pretence of cheerfulness had been rather hollow; but Joe, whose mind fled from silence, repeated the last half of the song, introducing a variation in its close: "Highty-tiddley-igthy, Tickle me under my nighty," which drew a loud laugh and made him feel much better; so that he pushed his head out of the window and, looking down the street, called out to a friend whose face and rifle were

issuing from a window next door : “ ‘*Ellow ! ’Ellow !* There’s old Moke Murdoch ! Hallo, Moke ! Are you still in these parts ? . . . ‘*Ere !* ” he ducked his head—“ Turn that bleedin’ rifle the other way. None of your jokin’ nah ! Joo think this is a time for jokin’ ? ” And turning towards the men with him in the room, he explained, “ It’s fellers pointing their rifles at one another that makes this war so dangerous.”

This as a laughter-getter was not a success, and the silence came back, disturbed only by a gentle whistling through Joe’s teeth.

“ Slow, ain’t it ? ” he offered at length.

“ That’s right,” agreed his neighbour, Jack Fowler. “ I wish to God, if they was coming, they’d come quickly.”

“ That’s right,” nodded a third. “ This waiting gets on your nerves.”

“ It does a bit,” nodded Jack Fowler. “ Where the devil are the b——s ? That scrappin’ sounds a goodish way off.”

“ That’s right,” agreed the other. “ It sounds as if it might be behind us.”

Joe couldn’t stand this talk, so he touched his rifle with mock nervousness, drew his fingers away as a woman might, and then shaped his shoulder to the butt and squinted along the sights.

“ I done this before,” he said. “ On Brighton Pier. I useter git a bottle every time. And ma missus useter say, ‘ Nah, Jow : now do be careful.’ ”

“ Art tha sure it was tha missus, Jaw ? ” asked the voice of the Lancashire soldier.

“ Yuss. You’ve a nasty mind. It was my missus all right. Many a time ma missus and I’ve ’ad our run dahn to Brighton, on Sundays, by Restall’s Trips. But gah ! don’t talk about missuses. It’s upsettin’, ain’t it ? Where are these bleeders ? Why don’t they come ? ”

He fell to chanting in a low monody, “ There’s a ship that’s bound for Blighty,” till someone called out humorously, “ Oh shurrup, Joe ! ” and a less humorous fellow endorsed the protest : “ Gawd, yes ! ”

This dejected utterance emptied the room of its last whiffs of cheerfulness ; and no one spoke. Men took their weight from one foot and put it on the other, or they absent-mindedly flicked some dust off the barrels of their rifles. One man, shifting his feet uneasily, trod on a shard of

broken glass and cracked it and cursed. Birds were greeting the morning with songs, despite its crackle of small-arm fire; but no one heard them. Nor could anyone have told when it was that the full daylight came.

"Slow, ain't it?" said Joe. "Lor, did I ever tell you this one, boys: how four of the Manchesters lawst their lives. It was when I was in the trenches at Haverincourt Wood——"

"Come awf it, Joe," laughed a fellow humorist. "You was never in the trenches."

"Yes, I was then! I was standin' on the fire-step one night lookin' through me periscope, and I see a shaller trench opposite, with the men walkin' abaht in it plain. Not above their knees, it wasn't. They was diggin' it; so I gits me rifle just as I got it now, and *ping!* that was one of 'em; *ping!* that was another; *ping!* over went another—gaw! it was money for jam. Next mornin' there was a hell of a pow-wow to find out how the devil the Hun was managin' to snipe our Manchesters who were making the new trenches in front of our line. *Wurl!* I meanter say! 'Ow was I to know it was Manchesters. I never let on, of course; but lummy! I did feel a fool at their funeral."

This lifted a fine laugh, and a continuing one, during which Tony returned to the room.

"They're coming, men," he said.

Hands and shoulders went to the rifles.

Higher up the street a Lewis gun spat; then another.

"H'm," a voice murmured. "Comin' nah."

"That's right," said Jack Fowler. "Them's our Lewis guns spittin'. Someone's seen 'em."

The Lewis guns stammered furiously.

"That's them. Now we're *for* it!"

"Gawd!" exclaimed Joe; and in his tone there was a plaint as well as excitement.

Tony, standing behind with his hand on his revolver in its holster, looked at Joe. Oh, what had been the argument by which he was to stiffen himself for this moment? How had it run? Hell! if he were not to fail, he had only seconds in which to think it out—and his brain wasn't working. . . . O God, don't let me fail. . . . I *did* arrive at a conviction that I must fight on as relentlessly as ever. How was it done——

Hereabouts Joe Wylie turned away from his rifle, though

still holding it with his left hand, and was quietly sick in the corner by which he was standing. The others paid little attention to him : their eyes were fixed on a bend in the road beyond which the Lewis guns were firing, and their bodies were braced taut behind their rifles : one or two swung glances towards him and away again. Joe looked up and met his officer's eye.

"Gaw, I'm sorry, sir," he said. "Can't help it. Got a bit o' wind up, and what with the excitement, it jest turned me stomach round. I'm a fool, I am." He brushed his sleeve along his moustache. "I feel better nah. . . . Come on, Joe——" he turned back to his rifle—"you didn't expect to join the army and *live*, did yer ? "

It was an old joke, often uttered by the men in such moments as these, as their laughing farewell to life ; and, like a flash in the sky, it lit up for Tony the justice of his love for England.

"No! She *shan't* go under!" he thought; and turned his revolver towards the battle.

It was on them immediately. It had raged round the bend in the road till apparently the Lewis guns were reduced, for they were speaking no more ; and now he saw the grey-clad enemy running towards them and kneeling to fire—but a fusillade—deafening ! glorious !—blazed from all the windows, sweeping the streets clean except for those twisted bodies that lay on the cobbles, either writhing or deadly still. That defiant salvo from the windows—A Company, B Company, D Company, all standing by !—lit a mad excitement in his throat and charged his breath with an unshouted cheer ; and inspired by it, he fired again and again, shouting encouragement to the men in the room, and leaning far out of the window to direct and applaud the others. He heard Joe's excited voice, as he too fired again and again, even at an emptied road : "Come on, me lucky lads. Every copper wins a prize ! Why, gaw ! it's money for jam ! Every time a cocoanut ! " ; bullets began to splinter the woodwork of their window casements and flatten themselves against the brickwork under the sills and sing into the room, cracking the ceiling above ; some of these gashes he heard, some he saw, as for a second his eyes swung towards the impacts ; and all the time he saw the men ducking, and drawing back, and returning their shoulders to their rifles for a quick nervous shot ; then he heard a voice, "Where are they getting us from ? There ! the s——s ! they're

firin' from them ground-floor windows ; ” and now the inhuman regularity of a machine-gun had joined the kindlier fire of the rifles, and its *tratta-tat, tratta-tat-tat-tat-tat* started terror in the heart ; his imagination saw its dotted line of bullets sweeping round as it visited the faces of the houses like the beam of a searchlight—inhuman, unintelligent, without caprice or mercy ; it was on them now ; he saw Joe Wylie slap his left hand to his right shoulder and collapse backwards on to a chair, yelling with a laugh that was partly hysteria and partly humour, “ Christ ! they’ve ’it me. They’ve ’it poor old Joe Wylie—gawd blast ’em ! ” ; and just as he saw this, his head took a blow like the blow of a steam-hammer with a white heat in its centre—and the war went out for Tony.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE CHANNEL

HE awoke in the ward of a hospital. A British hospital : there were pyjama'd officers sitting up in their beds and talking English ; there was an R.A.M.C. orderly arranging the drugs and lint on a long table in the centre of the room ; and at the far end, by a recumbent form on a bed, there was a doctor in his khaki whispering with a nurse in her grey and scarlet.

For some seconds this did not strike him as strange ; but as he felt the constriction of bandages round his head and, putting up his hand, stroked the thick upholstery there, he began to piece together the jig-saw of the past, and he saw again that room in Grandpré and the fighting in the street, and Joe Wylie clapping his hand to his shoulder, and then—the black-out. Surely he ought to be a prisoner in German hands—but he looked again : no, there was no doubt about this being the ward of a British hospital : by the matchboarding of its walls, and the rafters, struts and tie-beams of its roof, it should be one of those large army huts. He moved : and, so doing, learned, after some prospecting with his hand, that his chest was bound up too ; which immediately made him aware of his own breathing—that it was short and disposed to whistle asthmatically. A chest wound ? He was never hit in the chest. What the deuce——

Once again : the Germans had been firing from the ground-floor rooms opposite ; they had brought a machine-gun into play ; Joe Wylie had been hit, and a second after——

“So you’ve come alive, have you ?” asked a voice on his right.

He turned and saw the pleasant eyes of a middle-aged man gazing at him from above the blankets of the next bed.

"Yes. Where *is* this?"

"Etaples."

"*Etaples!* Gum, how the deuce did I get here?"

"On a stretcher, I suppose."

"Yes, but——"

And he posed the problem to his neighbour, who, in course of the catechism, explained himself as a major of the Koylis. The Major could not solve the riddle completely, but he gave him a *résumé* of all that had happened on the battle-front during the last few days—how the French and Australians had brought up more and more divisions and on March 29th had fought the Germans to a standstill; and Tony, counting up the dates on his fingers, decided that the morning of the French-Australian attack was the morning of the fight in Grandpré. It was maddening not to know his own story, and what had become of Arnold and little Carder, of Colonel Tappiter and Joe Wylie.

"Doc——" this was the Koyli Major calling out to the doctor, who was walking slowly down the room and continuing his earnest colloquy with the nurse. "Doc. This lad's alive, and gassing."

The doctor came across to them: a young round-cheeked Scot, with a toothbrush moustache; one of those whose faces give them away at once: a very earnest young man, rather humourless, and much pleased with his position of authority.

"Ah, good!" he said. "By Jove, you've had a narrow shave, Captain." Apparently he had not been in the army long enough to know that captains were not so addressed. "Losh! that bullet as near as next door got your brain."

"Perhaps it couldn't find one," suggested the Koyli Major facetiously.

"Ah-ha-ha," laughed the doctor. "Perhaps not, Major."

Tony touched the bandages on his chest.

"But what are these, doc.?"

"Oh, you got another there, Captain. It went—er—rather close to the lung, but it's doing nicely."

"Funny!" frowned Tony. "I never felt that one."

"Quite possible," said the doctor.

Tony was mystified still. "What date is it?"

"Seventh of April."

"Seventh! Then it's ten days since——"

"Yes. You've been in here three days, and Lord knows

how long you were held up in the C.C.S.s. There's been some congestion, you see."

Tony, with all the small pride of a soldier who has seen for himself what other men tell by hearsay, rather resented being told that there was some congestion.

"I know. I saw just a little," he said. "But have I been unconscious all the while?"

The Koyli Major answered this:

"You've been half-conscious sometimes, but damned silly. Never heard such b——s as you talked."

"Ah-ha-ha," laughed the doctor. "But that was natural, you see."

"Go on!" exclaimed the Major, surprised. "Was it?"

"What time of the day is it?" Tony asked.

"Three o'clock," said the doctor.

"And the seventh of April. H'm. . . . Did they get Amiens?"

"Who? The Huns? Losh, no! And they won't now."

"Is the battle over then, Doc.?"

"As good as over. The line's been more or less stable for a week now; and we reckon that means the beginning of the end for the Huns. They can't do much more, so they can just take their punishment now, and I hope they get it hot and strong."

Tony moved irritably. "Forgive me, doc., but out here we gave up that hate-talk just about three years ago. However, go on. Why is it over?"

The doctor gave the reasons learnedly. "They've shot their bolt, you see. They pushed on much too far in front of their heavy guns, and they've failed to break through in spite of all, and the whole thing's cost them about a hundred thousand men, which they couldn't afford to lose. Oh, we're very cock-a-hoop down here. We reckon the war's just about won."

"You wouldn't if you'd been up there," Tony could not refrain from saying.

"Hear, hear," agreed the Koyli Major.

The doctor was hurt. "Oh, but we've had our nasty times down here," he said. "We had one of our hospitals bombed a little while ago."

"Did you now?" asked the Major. "Damn! you've seen the war, then."

"Yes, most of us think that you fellows up there have a less nerve-racking time than we do, because, after all, you can hit back."

"Well, perhaps so," granted Tony, too weak to argue. "I wonder if I can get any information about my battalion. I'm rather anxious about a young subaltern called Carder——"

"Carder?" said the doctor. "He's here."

"Here?"

"Aye. In another ward. He came down by the same train as you."

"Is he bad?"

"No. A smashed arm. Going to England to-morrow."

"Oh, by Jove! can't I see him? Is he a Walking Case?"

"Yes. Oh, yes. I'll go and find him. Only don't talk too long."

As the doctor went out of the door, the Koyli Major asked, "Can't you do something to stop him calling you 'Captain'?" It sends up my temperature."

"Yes," Tony agreed; "and his 'Ah-ha-ha' is rather trying."

Then Carder came. Tony's first impression of him was of one wide grin, with an arm in splints beneath it.

"Well I'm ——!" said Carder, nodding a few dozen times as he contemplated Tony from the foot of the bed. "I repeat it: I'm ——!"

Tony besought news of all that had happened at Grandpré.

"Oh *that*?" said Carder. "That little scrap. How much did you see of it before they put you to sleep?"

"About six minutes."

"Oh well——" Carder put his mouth on one side and raised his free hand to pull at his chin—"we never quite understood what their b—— idea was. I think myself that they supposed they had open country in front of them with perhaps a few stragglers or a small rearguard which they could mop up in half no time, and they took the jar of their lives when they got old Tappiter's Lewis guns in their chests. Then, you see, that made 'em angry and they came on—you know—really peeved."

"What about Arnold?" interrupted Tony.

Carder sent his gaze through the window.

"Oh, he went west with the guns."

"I see. Well, what next?"

"Well, then, having silenced the guns, as the press correspondents say, they intended to clear the village at the bayonets' point, and they came doubling round the corner—and all they knew then was our rapid fire. It made a most unpleasant mess of them."

"Yes. I saw that."

"Well, being sensible lads, they withdrew under cover, and sniped us for a little, and then came on again, shouting and yelling. Darned plucky lads, they were. It seemed almost bullying to shoot 'em down, but what would you?—not to say *que voulez vous?*—we let 'em have it. My boys were wonderful; and I picked off about six, with a rifle borrowed from one of my boys who had been hit and was a-cussin' something awful, O.G. By the by, you remember I was in the house next to you: well, they got some machine-guns going—our Lewises, I dare say—and really they were rather irritating. Most of my boys who stopped one stopped it with their dials—which must be painful. I think they tried to rush the houses three times, but we were not having any, and they went back to scratch their heads over it. Now if I'd been in command at that juncture, I'd have liked *us* to do some cleaning up of the village, but old Tap held his hand. Meanwhile, you must know, there was a hell of a battle going on in the south: it was the French and the Aussies giving 'em something to think about; and I fancy our little German lads began to wonder if their enthusiasm hadn't carried 'em quite far enough—not to say too far—and whether their left wasn't being biffed in. Anyhow, discretion overcame 'em, and when old Tap sent his scouts out, they'd slung their hook. I can't tell you any more, because then the Walking Wounded were ordered to report to the M.O. and as I was one of 'em——"

"You never said when you were hit."

"Oh, didn't I? It was somewhere in the second over. Nothing much. So I toddled across to your house to see how you were, and as you were dead, I put the C.S.M. in command, which pleased him no end, and then went down to the Mo's Sick Parade. And gradually all the stretchers were collected here, including you, and the Ambulances came up, and we wondered whether you were worth your place in one of 'em—a dust-cart seemed more in your line, but we decided to do it: one never knows."

"Yes, exactly. Well, never mind that. What about Joe Wylie?"

"Wylie? Oh, he's in England by this time."

"Good. I'm glad."

"Yes. And I think he's glad too. Fact, I think he was delighted to have his shoulder smashed. He said, 'That'll learn all the blokes what laughed at me for being a scrimshanker! That'll learn 'em!' And he's going to do no more work for the rest of his natural, but just live like a gent on his disablement pension. *I'm* going to England soon."

"So I've heard. And good luck to you."

"Yes, and I've quite enjoyed my week-end visit to the front, but I doubt if they'll want me any more. I say, O.G., do you know that Boulogne's simply stiff with Americans, and there's heaps of 'em here and at Paris-Plage—such smart lads—so clean!—with high collars and spotless uniforms. And, O.G.! They shave—just as we do!"

"Excellent, Carder!"

"Yes, and I say, have you studied your priceless doctor? He thinks he's living in the forefront of the battle, bless his heart! I tell you, these lads down here don't know there's a war on."

Tony said nothing to deflate young Carder's simple pride at having spent ten days in the real forefront of the battle; he didn't suggest to him that his knowledge of the war fell as short of other men's as the excellent young doctor's fell short of his; he saw that these unspoken controversies between man and man, in which they compared their shares in the war, must persist till the generation of its survivors had passed away.

It was a long time before they sent Tony to his hospital ship for evacuation to England; and he was a Walking Case when he went up its gangway. Summer gilded the houses, masts and bridges of Boulogne and stippled the water of the harbour with its golden light. Slowly his white hospital ship went out between the white jetties and passed the masts of the steamer sunk at the harbour's mouth. Outside Summer lay on the peaceful sea, like a gull with folded wings. The boat was moving quickly now, so he kicked off the rugs wrapped round him by a kindly nurse, and walked forward to the deck-rail that he might watch the recession of the cliffs of France. Behind that wall of cliff and those rolling downs, and along a

stretch of country from Nieuport to La Fere, there were millions of his countrymen strewn, thick as autumnal leaves. And under them were last year's leaves, and the falls of '16, '15, and '14, deep in the mould. He knew that he would not return to them any more : not again see the revetted trenches, the grey pill-boxes, and the trestled wire ; not again see the squatting howitzers under their canopies of rabbit-run netting and branches, the field-guns in their jazz-coloured paint, the huts in the same harlequin dress, and the columns of men marching up the poplared highways with songs and blasphemies and jests. Strange that it could be so sad to know that he would never see any of it any more ! Why, he was almost homesick on this ship steaming fast to England, as one is homesick for an old landscape and an old way of life, when one comes from bidding them farewell. Farewell, old war ! To think that the days are fast bearing down upon us when you will have no existence except as men call you up in visions, and they but fading visions, with outlines insecure ! To think that the years are at hand when we shall peer like short-sighted men into memory, trying to see you better ! Was it thus—or was it thus ? One forgets.

Like a child playing a game of good luck and ill luck, he told himself that he must not take his eyes from the cliffs till their last faint pencilling had gone into the haze. So he watched till, like a name one struggles to remember, he could almost see them but not quite. They would not come for all his effort, and he abandoned them.

But Summer, sporting on the water, filled all the Channel with light ; and to see the last of France was to see the beginning of England. The Kentish cliffs sketched themselves between the sea and the sky. England.

BOOK III
MARY LEITH

SONG

*I wonder did you dream when you were small
Of a full life gaily coloured. And it's gone—
Too faded for your thoughts to dwell upon ;
Old woman, tell me, was it worth it all ?*

*You loved with suffering once, as now do I ;
And here and there a task you carried through ;
And sometimes you despaired, as I this evening do,
Nor dared to think you'd take so long to die.*

*And so towards the end, and what it brings,
You move unlabouring, for it's all too late.
You wait—
Forgive me, I am young and ask these things :
Old lady, is it beautiful to wait ?*

PART III.

CHAPTER I

TO MEET THE NEW CURATE

SOMETHING was happening in the Tin Room beside the Church. Light slanted from its seven windows and splashed on the asphalt yard, and a loud sound of chattering poured down these seven shafts of light. One pane which had been broken by the Girl Guides three nights before let out through its triangular hole the sharpest ray of sound. Sound, to the fanciful, can be very like light; and this noise in the Tin Room seemed a white glamour of women's voices darkened now and then by a man's baritone or a man's cough. It was easily the liveliest thing in dark St. Wilfrid's Road to-night; and just as the bright windows put out the stars overhead, so this brilliant patch of sound put out the murmur of the sea which was lifting and sinking on the Thamesmouth mud, not fifty yards away.

The lofty church stood in fine contrast to the little Tin Room under its flank. It was dark and shut and silent. It loomed up from the asphalt into the sky, like a rock of grey stone, as solid and permanent as the Tin Room was flimsy and unstable. Perhaps there was a parable here. Perhaps the Church endures; while all that the Tin Room stands for is as temporary and unstable as itself.

The din of voices stopped within the Tin Room, because Mr. Broadley had mounted its low platform and was smiling upon his people. Mr. Broadley was the Vicar of St. Wilfrid's, Thamesmouth; and there is no man who need smile from a platform quite so often as the Vicar of an Anglican Church whose congregation is held together, not by dogmas, since they all believe different things, but by geniality, since they all like the Vicar. Mr. Broadley relied entirely upon geniality.

For years past, in his preaching and his speaking, he had used only wide, unexceptionable generalizations, because these were weapons which one could flourish bravely, yet with danger to none. And geniality was the widest of all these generalizations: it was his generalization of Christianity. So to-night, from his undistinguished platform, he smiled upon his people, who rewarded him with silence. Some who had been standing dropped into chairs by the little round tables where the coffee cups were, and the cakes. Others who could find no seats leaned against the wall.

They were matter for contemplation. So many of them were old; so many of them, whether old or young, were vaguely old-fashioned. . . . Not all. . . . The majority of them were women; and about the dress of most of them there was a faint disharmony because it was neither wholly of God nor wholly of the world. It was noticeable that their complexions were less good than those you would find in the world, because they eschewed cosmetics (one might perceive that there was no smell of scent in the room) though quite a few of them had compounded with the Devil to the extent of using his powder. None of this was true of the men, because there is only one dress and one skin for men, whether they are of the world or of God. Of these men what a number with grey beards! And those that were still young, were they inclined to be a little weedy and anæmic? Not all. Some were vigorous fellows with bright, intelligent eyes. There was matter for a generalization here, but it would not be a secure one.

A conspicuous figure was Miss Pocock who led the Girls' Friendly Society and the Coleborough Diocesan Purity Association. She was the Paid Lady Worker. Her thin figure had been flitting blithely among the people, and her high voice had even been shrieking among the people, because she combined, in the most astonishing way, a kittenishness with her thirty-nine years, and an archness with her godliness. Or perhaps this demeanour of hers was just her Vicar's geniality tricked out in feminine flounces. She had already called the Vicar a "naughty man," and accused Mr. Bray, the People's Warden, of having "a nasty little temper." She had said "Fie!" to the young man who superintended the Leigh Road Sunday School, and "Romeo, Romeo, wherefore art thou Romeo?" to another youth who called down to her from the gallery over the West Door. It was like Miss Pocock to be

the last left standing, and to execute a kittenish run, her shoulders fluttering in alarm, to a vacant chair. She sat fanning herself in an affectation of breathlessness and heat, and, like all the others, looked up at the Vicar.

They saw a man of moderate height, with the slack plumpness and red-veined skin that is the price of drift and fifty. His face was round and limp; his eyes faded but friendly; his mouth square with selfishness but smiling now. He wore a suit of pepper-and-salt serge, baggy and stained, and he was unaware that a corner of his black silk stock had escaped the control of his waistcoat and blossomed under his collar into a little petal of white lining. His hands had gone into his pockets; and this, throwing open to view the width of his waistcoat, seemed to add expansiveness to the smile. His sleeves, crumpling up, unveiled red hairy wrists and a margin of grey flannel cuffs.

The few people of strong vitality in his audience were courageous enough to clap; and the weaker ones immediately copied them. Some of the fatter and rosier ladies even lifted up their hands into the air and clapped them forcibly there. The Vicar smiled wider in acknowledgment; and, since attentive listeners are apt to mimic the play of their orator's features, they all smiled back at him; and none had any idea how fatuous smiles can look when they are extended to a speaker in advance of anything he may say.

The Vicar spoke.

"Well, dear people"—but at that moment there was a jumbled noise of crockery and conversation in the little room behind the platform, where the tea urns and the coffee urns were receiving the ministrations of two steamed charwomen; and Miss Pocock with a "Tch! Tch!" tripped out to quiet it, her shoulders swinging. The Vicar waited.

"Well, dear people, I am sure it is a great source of gratification to myself, and to Alderman and Mrs. Scrase, to see such a goodly gathering of our people here to-night. I know that, if it had not been for the inclemency of the weather earlier in the day, a still greater number of you would have turned out—but where we should have put them all, I can't say——"

This appearing like the joke for which they had hung out their anticipatory smiles, they allowed them to ripple into laughter. The Vicar bowed.

"You all know the real purpose for which we are assembled,

but before I come to that, I want, on your behalf, to offer the gratitude of us all to our worthy Vicar's Warden and Mrs. Scrase, who are our hosts this evening, and to our indefatigable Miss Pocock and all those other ladies who have helped to make this function such a signal success."

Applause was incumbent here, and all eyes turned towards the tall narrow old gentleman who sat on the left, under the platform, with his long legs crossed and his long arm lying on a table. He slightly raised the arm in deprecation.

In Alderman Scrase the eyes of the audience saw a very familiar figure. Up and down their aisles every Sunday it moved with its peculiar dignity; always dressed with the same precise neatness—striped morning trousers, black morning coat and vest, high starched collar and big bunched tie pierced by a golden pin. They were proud of his fine narrow face so reminiscent of the Iron Duke's, and few of them perceived that, if it was a remarkably handsome face, it was also remarkably empty of light, or that, if as a rule its expression was serious and kind, it could also harden at times with obtuseness and obstinacy. It was only a few waggish ones who, observing this, called him "The Wooden Duke."

By his side sat Mrs. Scrase, his perfect partner: grey like himself and dignified like himself, but as round as he was angular and as soft as he was firm—refined, gentle, kindly, conscientious Mrs. Scrase, in her black silk dress with the grey fichu and the heavy gold chains. She picked up a gold chain and gazed upon it in modesty while the crowd applauded.

"I do not have the opportunity as often as I should like," continued Mr. Broadley, when the applause had dwindled, and it dwindled quickly, for Alderman Scrase was more honoured than loved, "of telling the Alderman, in a public assembly, what a satisfaction it is to our people that the principal lay officer of our parish should also be one of the principal citizens of our borough"—the Vicar pronounced it "burrow." "That he has twice been Mayor of our town is known to us all, and that he is always high in its councils; and—sir—I think I may say that we all hope to see you, in the near future, presiding once again over the destinies of this large and important burrow."

The audience, being an amenable flock, instantly produced their applause.

"Our congregation at St. Wilfrid's," began the Vicar again—

and they stared up at him to hear about themselves. Most of them had a dim knowledge of what was coming, and were ready to endorse it. They had heard it often before and had always endorsed it comfortably: it was safely generalized and therefore unexceptionable. ("Unexceptionable" is a favourite word of Mr. Broadley's, and his people speak his language.)

It came exactly as they expected it. Mr. Broadley spoke of the Happy Relations existing between the Civil and Religious Authorities in Thamesmouth, the Necessity of Religion in the Corporate Life of the Body Politic, and the Part of the Church in the Life of Our Burrow. He spoke also of the Message of The Christ to Our Young People To-day, and of Our Obligations, as a Christian Institution, to Our Returned Men, who had a first claim, surely, upon Our People. Alderman Scrase nodded his approval now and then; Mrs. Scrase listened with unintelligent sympathy; and the audience clapped at the proper intervals. These were the ever-recurring topics of their pastor, and though, in his mental slackness, he had but the foggiest idea how his particular church, with its gospel of inoffensive generalizations, could really affect the life of borough, youth, and returned ex-service men, he was sincerely anxious to believe that it *was* doing so—in some manner, perhaps, beyond his comprehension and by the grace of God. To which end he sat on most committees, appeared on most platforms, organized Mayor's Sunday Services, and became a Rotarian.

"But the main purpose of this little function this evening, so thoughtfully and generously organized by Mr. and Mrs. Scrase, is to extend the cordial welcome of our congregation to one who has just come to work in our midst. He brings all the keenness and enthusiasm of his youth. He brings also, if I may say so, a Great Experience. Mr. O'Grogan, who, from now onward will be my colleague, is one of those—and they were not a few, I would have you remember, dear friends, *not a few*—who heard the call to their Master's service while they were Out There"—the Vicar pointed vaguely in the direction of the room where the charwomen were washing up—"in the blood and the mud of the trenches. He has served with distinction on many fronts of the Great War—on the diseaseridden beaches of Gallipoli, the scorching sands of Sinai, and in the—in the blood and the mud of France. He has stood

for long and terrible years shoulder to shoulder with our gallant, our *noble* men, in the Valley of the Shadow of Death, and he has, he tells me, the highest opinion of them. He has seen them in the lowest depths of suffering and agony and— and distress ; and he has felt most urgently the need of harvesting something of good from all this bitterness and death. He has learnt, I am sure, to say ‘ We who have seen men cry like a broken child, we know man is divine.’ He has glimpsed, like many another, a vision of The Christ moving out there in the battle and the smoke and the din. He has also received the D.S.O.”

This drew the longest applause yet ; and a young man seated below the platform, on the opposite side from Alderman Scrase, lowered his face.

“ He has himself been wounded in the service of his country—a wound that might have been fatal, he tells me, in his head.”

Many cast glances at the young man’s head.

“ Some of us older ones may envy him his experience—not of being wounded, of course ”—the Vicar smiled, and the audience, assuming that this was another quip, gave him of their laughter—“ but of standing by our gallant men in their Dark Hour, and of comforting them and strengthening them, as I am sure he did. I myself applied for a chaplaincy at an early phase of the hostilities, but I was over military age, and moreover our good bishop assured me that my proper place was on the Home Front, where I could do my best work, keeping the flag of the Church flying—now that so much of its young blood had marched away to the wars—confirming the courage, the confidence, and the hope of Our People at Home, and ministering to those—alas, so many ! so many !—who had lost their loved ones. This I tried to do.”

The audience clapped, to intimate that he had succeeded.

“ But I realized when, in the mercy of God, the Cease Fire sounded, that I should have but a poor appeal to Our Returned Men, when in the fullness of time they returned to their homes and dear ones ; and I looked round for a colleague who could do for these dear fellows what I myself could never do—for I *do* feel most deeply that they have a first claim on us, at this time. I wanted a man who had been with them in their suffering. Good fortune—indeed, I hope and believe it was something higher than good fortune—led me to Mr. O’Grogan, who, it will interest you to know, was a Captain with our own 15th

Royal West Essex, our own dear Thamesmouth territorials, and who has been with them in all their fortunes, on the disease-ridden beaches of Gallipoli, the burning sands of Sinai, the—er—and in all the other places where they served with such distinction during the Great War. This will give him, I feel, a singular appeal to them, and to our Young People too, and I was very happy indeed when he signified his willingness to come and work with me. I am sure he comes amongst us with a very Wholesome Message. He is Irish, he tells me, but we can forgive him that.” (Some laughter.) “I should never have believed it, if he hadn’t told me: he looks quite respectable.” (Loud laughter.) “But no doubt this means that he will be properly pugnacious, and will make us mind our p’s and q’s. And in all other ways, I can assure you, he is quite unexceptionable. I can only add that I hope his ministry here will be a long and happy one. Er—perhaps Alderman Scrase would like to say a few words.”

Mr. Broadley stepped down from the platform; and the Vicar’s Warden took his place; and the contrast was sharp indeed, between the grossening untidy clergyman with his genial smile, and the tall, well-tailored alderman, with his handsome features and humourless eyes. Alderman Scrase unbuttoned his faultless morning coat, felt the gold pin in his bunched black tie, and then fumbled with the gold watch-chain and signet ring which decorated his waistcoat. Perhaps it was typical of the man that he should still honour the old fashion of a heavy gold chain and heavy signet rings. He began his speech—and any keen observer in that room (there was one on the right, sitting in the new curate’s trousers) must have known directly that the language of the alderman was going to be as stereotyped as that of the priest, but that its phrases would be those of the Council Chamber while the priest’s were those of the Parish Room. And the same keen observer, listening, would discern a far sincerer heart behind Mr. Scrase’s austere front than behind Mr. Broadley’s pleasant shop-window, though he would suspect that the Vicar’s insincerity, thanks to the dulling of his inward vision, was less conscious than unconscious. Mr. Scrase was submitting that it would be impossible to add much of value to what had already been said so admirably by their good Vicar, and he would content himself therefore with stating his full agreement and corroboration. There was just one personal note which

perhaps he might sound, on this happy occasion when they welcomed Mr. O'Grogan among them. It would be within the recollection of them all that he had lost his own dear boy at the front, but few would know that he was killed in action fighting in the same battle with their guest of honour this evening——

Most eyes turned towards the young man on the right of the platform, but none soon enough to perceive his start and his shiver. They saw him with his face upturned to the speaker. There was nothing strange to be read upon it.

"And," continued the Alderman, "that the duty devolved upon none other than this Mr. O'Grogan—or Captain O'Grogan, as he was then—to supervise my son's interment and to lay him in his last resting-place."

The Alderman swallowed once, and cleared his throat while a silence, charged with sympathy, stilled his hearers.

Most thought that the Alderman was speaking beautifully: only the young man on the right of the platform was filling with wonder that words so stilted could hold a grief so sincere. "Supervise his interment!" He filled not only with wonder but with pity.

"If on no other score," proceeded the Alderman (and "score!" thought the young man), "I must always feel a deep interest in Captain O'Grogan, and I do most heartily join you in felicitating him on his ordination to the diaconate, in welcoming him to his ministry at St. Wilfrid's, and in wishing him every joy and success therein."

Mr. Scrase stepped off the platform, applause following him.

"Mr. Bray?" invited the Vicar.

The People's Warden stepped to the place where the Vicar's Warden had stood; and again the sharp contrast. Mr. Bray was a plump little grocer of Thamesmouth, and one could see that his tailor lived next door to him, not in London like the Alderman's. His tailor had drawn from a pile that black coat and vest which Mr. Bray conveyed to the platform, and, being an outfitter too, had fitted him with that old-fashioned fourfold collar, that made-up bow tie, that stiff "dicky" which shone between collar and waistcoat, and those detachable cuffs which revealed their detachment so openly, by sinking too far over the large fat hands of Mr. Bray. Mr. Bray opened his coat and pushed a forefinger into each of the lower pockets of his waistcoat; then removed the right forefinger to run it between

his round collar and his round neck, and finally gave up the whole hand to a scratching of his head. He had not the elegant speech of his senior, nor the dignified carriage, and he seemed to feel this. He had, however, a happy thought.

"There's one thing I reckon we've forgotten," said he, "and that is Mr. O'Grogan's better half—Mrs. O'Grogan."

Much clapping and laughter encouraged him, and all eyes reached for Honor O'Grogan where she sat at her husband's side. They saw a pretty little woman, with plentiful auburn hair, a round face, and eyes now happily smiling. She was cheerfully if rather childishly dressed in a rose-coloured frock; and, after her pretty face, perhaps the most noticeable thing about her, in the women's eyes, was the width and shapeliness of her shoulders.

"I reckon we're as lucky in her," proceeded Mr. Bray, "as we are in him. I've been talking to her, and she's one of the best, I can assure you. Our good Vicar and the better of our two Churchwardens—"

"No, no!" protested Alderman Scrase—

"—have been congratulating Mr. O'Grogan on his war service and his Distinguished Service Order, and his what-not; I should like to congratulate him on his wife."

Ah! none were to know that the ache of an old pain beat in Antony O'Grogan then. He was looking up at the speaker with a smile; how could the people know—Honor herself did not know—that Mr. Bray had stabbed him?

"All our wives are important to us in our jobs"—"Hear, hear"—"not as important as they think they are"—"Shame! Shame!"—"but none are quite as important as the curate's wife, especially when our Vicar's misguided enough not to be married. We welcome her as we welcome him, and that's about all I want to say. A short speech and a sweet one."

And Mr. Bray took himself to his chair, where he touched his brows with a handkerchief.

"Now Mr. O'Grogan himself," suggested the Vicar; and the good-hearted people seconded his invitation with the liveliest clamour of the evening.

The young man was standing on the platform, a tall, spare athletic figure. His face pleased, but more by its intelligence and humour than by its features, though these were good enough; it was a youthful face, and its youthfulness was heightened by the early greying of the hair above the ears and by the lines of

contemplation scored across the brow. The eyes held the audience ; they were whimsical eyes, and brighter than any that had looked at them to-night.

"It is really terribly kind of you," said he—and at this simple opening they began to doubt if he would ever be a good speaker—"to come together like this to welcome me ; and I do thank the Vicar, Alderman Scrase, and Mr. Bray for the kind things they have said about my wife and myself. You will understand that I am full of doubts and diffidences about the work I have undertaken, but I shall try to do it as well as I can. I may say I haven't half the confidence in myself that the Vicar seems to have in me, but there it is !"—the whimsical eyes smiled—"we must hope for the best. Thank you all so much."

He had finished. The speeches were over, and the meeting became a noisy *conversazione* again. And among the little knots of talkers one verdict was pronounced : they liked Mr. O'Grogan very much as a man but feared they were going to be disappointed in him as a speaker. But there ! it was rather difficult for him to follow two such speakers as the Vicar and Alderman Scrase.

Ten o'clock. There lurks in the misty places of many religious minds a notion that the hours up to ten o'clock are not ungodly. Those that follow it, however, deteriorate with every quarter that chimes, till at the stroke of midnight their character becomes dubious indeed. Ten o'clock is undoubtedly the top of many a good man's hill ; beyond it his day enters upon a darkness more blessed with the grin of Satan than with the countenance of God. So as soon as ten o'clock had clanged from the high places of St. Wilfrid's the Social Gathering in the Tin Room began to break up. Couple by couple, group by group, the guests proffered their thanks to Vicar and Alderman, and their exceeding goodwill to Mr. O'Grogan and his wife, and departed. When the room was nearly empty and rather sad, Tony and Honor gave likewise of their gratitude and went out into the night.

They had not far to walk to their new home. It was a *maisonnette* in one of the uniform houses of St. Wilfrid's Road. Antony O'Grogan, when he took Orders, had certainly

embraced poverty, though it is open to question whether, in these years after the war, an ex-schoolmaster-officer could have embraced anything else. His annual income at its best would not add up to more than £450. He had £150 a year of his own, now that his father and mother were dead; £250 from his stipend, and another £50, perhaps, from the Whitsun Offering. With this for their revenue Honor and he could budget for no more than this tiny half-house, with its study, living room, two bedrooms and kitchenette. He led her into the study, which was a little square room of white shelves all crammed with books. It had a desk under the window and two easy chairs in front of the gas stove. They did not take the chairs or light the stove, for Honor was tired and patting a yawn.

"Bed for me," she said. "Good night, Tony dear."

They kissed; and Honor was satisfied with the kiss. She did not know that it had awoken in him, as it always did, the old pain. It was the kiss of friends, not of lovers. It was the kiss of habit, not of need. And she had long been satisfied with it; and he would never be. Honor was content with "palliness" instead of passion; and he was hungering, in the day-time and in the night-time, to kiss a woman whom he really loved. Fool to make such an ache of it! Honor was a good little thing and very pretty sometimes, and loyal; he should have the sense to make the best of a good thing. To-night he did not let her go at once but passed his hands over her wide shoulders, which had been the first things about her that he had loved. Strange that he could be quite fond of her and yet she could give him so much pain.

Sprightly always, she lifted herself on her toes and looked at him with eyes a-sparkle.

"Isn't it all going to be frightfully exciting?"

(There! She was miles away from his thoughts. He let fall his hands.)

"Well . . . I found more occasion for alarm than excitement in that comical performance this evening."

"But why?"

"Oh, I dunno. . . ."

"I think it's going to be awful fun. Much better than teaching at Stratton Lye."

"Well, let's hope so. But I wish I were more of a saint."

"You're all right. You'll do terribly well."

"Ummm. . . . Doubt it. . . . However, we shall see, we shall see. Good night, my dear."

"Good night. Don't wake me if you're late."

She had not been five minutes gone before, yielding to an impulse, he extinguished the light and went out on to the pavement again. He walked towards the church. That afternoon, on his arrival at Thamesmouth, he had received from Mr. Broadley a key that fitted all the doors of St. Wilfrid's ; and now, as he walked, his fingers went into his pocket and felt for that little key. He turned on to the asphalt lane which ran between the great cliff of the church's south wall and the flimsy side of the Tin Room. The square windows of the Tin Room were as dark and silent now as the tall lancet windows of the church ; and one saw the stars again and heard the breathing of the sea. There was hardly another sound anywhere, except the shunting of engines far away, and the scream of a tram, as, grating on its lines, it turned into its depot. In the south porch he fumbled about the door till he had traced the lock ; he turned the key in it, pushed open the door, and felt for a switch in the wall. Touching it, he lit a single lamp that hung in the centre of the church. Its circle of light bathed litany desk and chancel steps, pulpit and lectern, but did little more than flush the darkness in nave and aisles. The air struck cold as a sepulchre, and there came a smell of varnished wood and dust and cold stone pillars.

Tony walked into the centre under the single light ; and he had hardly turned and fronted the altar before a rattling high up in the western gable jumped his heart. It was only the church clock adjusting itself to strike midnight. He allowed it to complete its strokes ; not till the last sound had died away would he begin to think.

Mr. Broadley's facile phrases about the Great War, the Blood and the Mud, and Our Returned Men—so glibly formed by the lips, and so little informed by the imagination. One could hate the man for them, as a slack hypocrite ; or one could love him, as a poor blind soul. And one loved him. One laughed and loved. Or tried to. Or hoped to be able to do so one day.

"Mr. O'Grogan has been through a Great Experience, my friends." Words, words, words. Mr. Broadley's imagination, long disabled by lack of use, had filled them with no real meaning.

What had the experience really been ? Yesterday, as he

waited for the Bishop's hands to be laid on his head in ordination, his brain had been at its clearest, and he had taken stock of his position and been satisfied with it. Now, after the first shock of disappointment, let him take stock again. Let him walk up and down, hands in pockets, from transept to transept, while he thought it out again.

Tony was an excellent analyst, and he had no difficulty in putting his finger on the beginning of it all. It had all begun, of course, with the sounding of that dominant note in his life, the need to possess someone's love completely and to give all to him. More than twenty years ago the note had sounded. A boy of eleven, he had stepped out through the wide doors of his prep-school and seen little Wavers standing on the gravel—little Wavers, eight years old, and beautiful as a girl child—and he had known that he must possess him. He had loved and bullied him, and the story had paled out in disgrace and shame. Then the others, all down the long lane of his youth: those for whom he had tormented himself with love in the most radiant patches of his life. And always Time had slain the love. Always. This was the thought that laid waste the heart. Sybil Chandry, by the lake of Grandelmere. Frank Doyly, in the class-rooms of Stratton Lye. Honor.

Honor! . . .

Then the war; then the "Great Experience." Come now: what had it all meant? The war had seemed to break over him with a sudden light: it had shown him that he must be done with these petty little personal loves; he must uplift and transmute them into a love for the world; and so, delighted with this idea, he had rushed out of his excessive "personalness" into the brilliance of the war.

And bah! What had happened? All through the war, right up to that fearful moment when he flung the bomb into the pill-box at Passchendaele, he had been more "personal" than ever in his life. All through the war, while his friends were dying around him, there had run, like an iron rod, his paltry obsession that he must do one big deed and have the triumph of a man who had slandered his courage. This had been his master-motive, and it had driven him to the pill-box at Passchendaele.

Ah, but there had been nobler parts than this in the "Great Experience": else how was he here at midnight, standing in a church as its servant?

One by one the pictures came: Willie Sparrow, dying in No. 201, near Proven behind Poperinghe; Art Webster dying in a cot on the opposite side of the tent; Padre Quickshaw bringing an untidy little Communion Service to their sides; and he, Tony, kneeling on the matting of the tent-floor, and knowing, as these fine, if sinful, men went out into the mystery, that nothing mattered in life except to love as many of them as possible, to serve them, to draw them closer and closer to one another in bands of love. . . . Knowing it and wishing he could be true to this side of himself. . . .

Then the martyrdom of Kit Scrase, best of them all. O Kit! . . . "The duty devolved upon Captain O'Grogan to supervise his interment." Oh, that good old man must never know.

Then the end of the war and the decision: "Dammit, if one's nobler parts kept saying, 'Don't let it all have meant nothing,' one had best do something about it!" And do it now: he was thirty already and could live but once. The enterprise would have been worth while, even if it foundered.

All these thoughts had encouraged him to go on: and so had another thought which came with a gentle, healing face. It bade him call up the humour which had always been in him and demand that it gave him a laughing toleration of all men, *including himself*. His egoism might be very damnable, but he must accept it, and laugh at it, and gradually transmute it. And passion for another person, at any rate, wouldn't trouble him any more. Even before the war, after the decay of his love for Honor, he had told himself that he would never play with the wild torment again; and he couldn't now, even if he wanted to. Yesterday, at noon, the Bishop had made him a deacon.

Yes, here in the church to-night, Tony believed that, with all this wisdom, he had at last put his hungry nature to rest.

And it *was* at rest—but only as a lion sleeping.

Well, one must hope for the best, and pray. Yes, pray. He went forward to the altar-rails and knelt there in prayer for a little while.

CHAPTER II

EAST AND WEST THAMESMOUTH

IN the main the railways of England run north and south, and her buses east and west. This is because her industry runs north and south, while her social life lies east and west. The trains bear the Englishman as a solitary tradesman or traveller, or shift and carry for him as a lonely merchant ; the buses work for him as a gregarious animal. And the buses move him westward in a black suit and a bowler hat, and eastward in a muffler, cap and corduroys. Eastward with minimum wages, westward with minimum wealth. Eastward to Poverty, westward to Position. One might argue that the configuration of the island has played a part in directing this social movement east and west ; one might suggest that the island tends to fall in gentle slopes from the mountains of Wales to the flats of East Anglia, and that the Englishman, having made good money, takes it quickly up a hill.

Consider her southern pleasure towns : not one but shows this westward escape of the well-to-do from contact with the eastward vulgar. Consider Eastbourne. The English have created many things to express their manifold genius : they have created the largest of Empires and the loveliest of ships : they have created Shakespeare and Shelley and the grandest corpus of poetry in the modern world ; they have created Parliament and the lesser temples of Justice and Common Law ; they have created a language unparalleled for luxuriance ; and they have created Eastbourne. It is astonishing. In Eastbourne the workers live eastward on the flats, and the wealthy live westward on the chalk hills of Meads. The pier is almost in the middle but not quite ; it is a little towards the east, for its virtue and fashion are equivocal. The lawns are well to the west, for they are places of the first fashion.

The sea-front, as it winds from Seaside in the east to Beachy Head in the west, gets cleaner and quieter and selecter and sadder, while the hill, ablow with tamarisk, rises and rises behind.

With or without a hill, the story is the same in Southend, Brighton, Hastings and Worthing. Sometimes the black coats and the bowler hats have built an entirely new town for themselves to the west of the old town, and have called it Westcliff, Hove, St. Leonards, and West Worthing. In the largest of their dominions the English have even built for their safe retirement a whole country westward over the mountains, and have called it British Columbia.

Thamesmouth is a pleasure town. It lies on the north shore of the Thames estuary, where the estuary begins to look like the sea. It has a hill on the right and flat country on the left, and an esplanade that runs along the whole sea-front like a grey band along the hem of a heaving gown. It turns its back to the station and its face to the sea, and, sending its buses and trains east and west, follows the English custom as surely as an English schoolboy will follow the customs of his school. But Thamesmouth is a hundred years old, and its westward town on the hill is a stucco town, not a red brick city like Meads, or Westcliff or West Worthing. In its stucco homes live business men, who, for the most part, discharge their business in London; retired men who, having no business to discharge anywhere, are free to worry about the weakness of the English in India; rich men who, having a high sense of service, or a high sense of importance, or both, seek places in the Council Chamber or on the Magistrates' Bench; some dead rectors' widows with small quiet homes, and dead officers' daughters with private boarding houses for private people like themselves; and some struggling schoolmasters with private schools "for the sons of business and professional men." Alderman Scrase lives in West Thamesmouth, as he lives in Meads and Hove and West Worthing, and Victoria, British Columbia.

And down on the flats, East Thamesmouth sprawls. The roads of East Thamesmouth are not roads but streets, which is to say that their ways are narrower, their roofs lower, and their windows dirtier; and that women gossip on their pavements while children play about their kerbs. In these streets live railwaymen, tramwaymen, carters, casual labourers, general dealers (which is to say, costers), errand boys, tipsters and some

who have no employment at all. Instead of private hotels we have public-houses down here, and instead of private schools the huge barracks of Elementary Schools (the Secondary Schools, we have noticed, tend to shift towards the west, though they are still beneath the hill). There are sticky little all-sorts shops down here such as you will not find up yonder; and a threadbare Recreation Ground with giant-stride and horizontal bar, and Mission Rooms. There are no mission rooms on the hill.

And, as often happens, the Parish Church sits exactly where the two towns meet. The houses of the poor beat up against the east wall of St. Wilfrid's, and the roadways from West Thamesmouth run down to its west door. It is a comely arrangement, but in Thamesmouth, so far, it has not been justified, for nearly all of St. Wilfrid's congregation trickles down those roads from the west, while the easterners linger behind the east wall. They wait there in their herded thousands, like the souls beneath the altar.

On the very first morning after his arrival in Thamesmouth, Tony came out of his door in St. Wilfrid's Road and turned eastward. There was one person in the crowded settlements whom he was eager to find. So eager that he walked rapidly. He walked along a main road that deteriorated with every hundred paces, till he came to a side street down which he turned. It was a street exactly like any of its sisters, the houses grey and narrow, and the doorsteps meeting the pavement. Children in the gutters halted their play to stare after him, and women at their doors stayed their chatter for the same reason and then resumed it with him as its topic. He arrived at a particular house and lifted his hand to knock at the door before he perceived that it was ajar. The doors of East Thamesmouth are as likely to be ajar as those of the west town are certain to be closed. He pushed it open a little further and looked down a narrow passage whose floor-boards were naked except for some ragged pieces of linoleum which dawdled in a lazy procession from the hall mat to the dark kitchen parts. A smell of stagnant air, moistened with cabbage steam, hung in the hall and greeted him on the face. The clock was past the noon hour.

He tapped his stick on the open door.

"Yuss? 'Oo is it?"

A woman's voice pitched this out from the kitchen parts.

Tony coughed; he could not say, "It's me," or "It's Mr. O'Grogan," because the woman in the kitchen did not know him; and he hesitated to say, "It's a clergyman from St. Wilfrid's," because he was doubtful how this household might welcome such an apostle.

"Yuss?" repeated the voice. "'Oo is it?"

This was most awkward. He coughed again.

"Is it important?" cried the voice.

He was not prepared to affirm its importance, nor yet to deny it, and while he was wondering how to express its neutral character, the lady of the back parts surrendered to her curiosity and came out of the kitchen door, wiping her hands on a cloth. She was a fattening woman of forty, with a mass of untidy golden hair. Her face was soft and fresh-skinned, with a pleasant, if harried, expression. Tony guessed at once that, though she might be slatternly to-day and virulent to-morrow, she had the crude flamboyance of personality and the splendid warmth of heart that so often belong to the daughters of the costers. A generous, slovenly, emotional blonde whose richness was running to fat.

She peered shortsightedly at the stranger in the doorway.

"Yuss?"

"Are you Mrs. Wylie?"

"Yuss."

"Tib Wylie?"

Mystified, she stared at his smile.

"Wurl, there's some as calls me that. It's Mr. Wylie's name for me. A sorta pet-name—if you take my meaning."

"I know," said Tony. "He has talked to me so often about you. He was my batman all through the war."

"*Law!*" Tib Wylie stared for ten seconds, and then dissolved her stare in a smile. "You aren't Mr. O'Grogan, by any chance, are yer? Or Captain O'Grogan, as I should say by rights, I believe?"

"I am."

"Well! . . . Well, there now! Captain O'Grogan? Did you ever! Come *in*, sir. Do come in. I'm sorry it ain't tidier for you, but I overlaid this mornin', and I ain't had a moment to put things right yet. What I 'aven't 'eard abaht you from Mr. Wylie! . . . He carries on abaht you six days of the week. Come in 'ere, sir, do." She led him along the passage and into the front parlour.|-

It was a stuffy little room whose floor-space was almost entirely covered by a bright green saddle-bag suite, a round table and a small bow-fronted sideboard. The larger pictures on the walls were reproductions of sentimental love-scenes played out by beautiful men and maidens in the costumes of another century. One was entitled, "A Slight Misunderstanding," and its partner, "Reconciliation." Next in importance to these fine pictures was the wedding group of Joe and Tib Wylie; and the characters posing here wore the forgotten costumes of twenty years before. In a corner stood a bamboo series of shelves, each holding its strange ornaments. On the mantelpiece were two large shells, a bird in a glass case, a clock in a glass case, and a silver-framed portrait of Joe when first he donned his khaki.

Tony went straight to this portrait, and his diaphragm trembled. Joe stood before him in a uniform impossibly smooth, with his face well shaved and his hair oiled down and his long moustache groomed left and right. Surely this picture placed on record the only hour in history when Joe's khaki was clean and his moustache in spruce array. And one had seen Joe's countenance impudent, or solemnly grinning, or paraded for the Colonel, but never so absurdly self-conscious as this. Pushed into the corner of this frame was a snapshot of four men, and Tony, prying into it, recognized Joe, Art Webster, Kit Scrase and himself standing outside the little dug-out in Leigh Ravine on Gallipoli. This gave him a quick stir of pleasure. It was good to think that his picture, if only a small one, had stood throughout the years on the mantel in Joe Wylie's parlour.

Tony might be looking at a picture, but Tib Wylie was taking a good look at him.

"Joo know what Joe always says, sir? He says 'Captain O'Grogan was a gen'l'man, and no mistake.' If Mr. Wylie's said that to me once, he's said it a hundred times. 'Him and me,' he's said, 'were together for three years, from Gallipoli in fifteen to the Great Retreat in ighteen.' Without a break, wasn't it, sir, except for his few spells in the cook-'ahse?'"

Tony nodded.

"And wasn't you wounded at the same time, sir?"

"Within half a second of each other. The same machine-gun."

"Well, there now! That kind of links you together, don't

it?" said the sentimental Tib. "Well, I'll jest be puttin' a match to the fire. We don't generally 'ave a fire in 'ere of a mornin'."

"Oh, please don't trouble about me, Mrs. Wylie."

"No trouble at all, sir. If I can't afford a bitta fire for you what was so good to Mr. Wylie——"

"Is he at home?"

"No, sir. Not at the moment. No, he's not at home jest nah." She was on her knees before the grate, and Tony, observing a movement of her shoulders and hearing a snff knew with alarm that she had succumbed to emotion. "Nah, he's at the 'Runnin' 'Orses,' I make no doubt of it—the public in Smith Street." She sniffed again. "He's generally there of a mornin', at this time. But you'll want to see 'im, of course. I'll see if I can get 'old of 'im for yer." She rose up and, without showing her face, went out of the room into the street. Tony heard her shrill voice calling: "Art . . . Arty. . . Is your Arty there, Mrs. Whitfield? . . . Arty, jest nip arahn'd to the 'Runnin' 'Orses,' will yer? there's a good boy, and see if Mr. Wylie's there; and if he is, tell 'im there's a gen'l'man come to see him—a minister from the church. No, p'r'aps you had better not say a minister. Say it's a gen'l'man what was with him in the war. *That'll* fetch him. . . . Thank you, dearie."

Returning to the parlour, and sitting opposite Tony, she said nothing for a little, but put her fingers into her untidy golden hair, and lifted it off her forehead as if her head ached. Then she sniffed and spoke sadly.

"Joe ain't the man he was. Nah, it didn't do 'im no good, being wounded—really."

"How do you mean?"

"Wurl . . . Gawd forgive me if I say anything against Mr. Wylie. 'E's always bin a good husband to me—in his *way*. And he's never bin one for the drink—not more than was natural. But he's lazy, sir, and he don't get no better. It done 'im no good, being a Disabled Ex-Service Man and drorin' a pension. It's set 'im up above himself, if you take my meaning. Him and his Disabled Ex-Service Man! I says to 'im, 'Why don't you git a steady job of work and add to your bit of pension?' and he says, 'There ain't no jobs to be 'ad, ole girl. We've served our country and bin wounded in her service, and nah she's no use for us'; and he goes awf

with his cornet and stands up against the doors of the pubs, and plays them ole war songs, 'Pack up your troubles in your ole kit-bag,' and all the like of them. He says they're winners every time with the men inside—but I dunno: sometimes when I'm aht doing me shopping, I see 'im playing in the street, and I dunno: there's no shyme to it, I suppose, but it's not a good class job—really."

"Never mind, Mrs. Wylie." Tony sought to cheer her up. "He was one of the great men of the war—none of us had any doubt of it. I remember his company commander saying to me that he was the soul of the battalion, just because he was its Funny Man."

"That was young Mr. Scrase, I suppose?"

Tony started, looked at her, and knew that she knew. By her inability to hold back the name, she had given her knowledge away. He quickly diverged from the question.

"Yes. . . . In fact, I always say it was the Funny Men like him who won the war for us. They enabled the others to stick it out."

"Oh, Joe's your Funny Man still, but it don't put much meat in the larder—if you take my meaning. 'No work?' I says, '*No work?* You don't look for work—you and your wounds!' Then he makes out that 'e needs an open-air life because he's got a touch of shell-shock too, though I don't believe he was ever shell-shocked any more than *you* was. Or *was* you, p'r'aps, sir?"

"No," confessed Tony.

"Nah," agreed Tib Wylie, much encouraged by this denial. "Nor gassed either. He says he can't abide stuffy rooms because he's still got mustard gas in his system. Did you ever hear that he was gassed, sir? *I* never."

"We all got whiffs of it sometimes."

"Yes, and that's about as much as *he* ever got, if you arst me. Besides, he could get a job on the roads, couldn't he? But he don't try—not what I call *try*. He says that they ought to find the proper job for a Disabled Ex-Service Man like 'im, and not expect 'im to go on his hands and knees for it; and that it's a cryin' shame to leave a worn-out old veteran like 'im to play a cornet in the streets and tell smutty stories for a living—*which* I hope you'll forgive me for putting it like that, but that's what it amounts to, and I don't care who hears me say it. But there! *he's* all right, sir—in his *way*. I ain't got no call to

speaking against him. It's only jest a pity he ever got wounded, and set up abaht it."

"I expect he'll gradually forget it all, Mrs. Wylie, as the war recedes."

"Yuss," said Tib; though the "Yuss" answered her own thoughts rather than Tony's. "Yuss, if he'd never got wounded and never drom a pension, he'd never have gawn political. He'd have had to find a job and then he'd have been on the side of them that was working instead of them that want to be paid for living. Paid for living, I says, and for being an ornament to the tahn!"

"Oh, he's gone political, has he?" laughed Tony.

"Yuss, sir. It's all them fellers he mixes up with at the 'Runnin' 'Orses.' Lot o' gammon they talks! I wish to Gawd he'd gawn religious instead. *That* makes 'em work."

Tony threw back his head and laughed. "We had some shots at making him religious in the army, but it was not a success."

"No, but he done it before, sir." Mrs. Wylie turned her face to Tony and nodded emphatically. "'E done it once. I had got almost over-religious, as you might say, just then—I never quite know what come over me—and I used to go regular to the Meeting here; and I took Joe along, and it proper got 'im, sir—you wouldn't believe it! . . . But it didn't last. . . . Not that Joe isn't a religious man—in his *way*. I always says as he's got the real thing in him, but doesn't know it: he loves his feller man, sir," explained Tib, with rich feeling; "you can't deny it—he loves his feller man."

"I'm sure he does, Mrs. Wylie."

"Yes; and that's the source of all his trouble—really. He's too companionable with them. That was why he went awf and enlisted when he was years over military age. And it's that more than anything else that takes 'im to the 'Runnin' 'Orses.' Oh, you mustn't think I've bin talkin' against him: we get on nicely—really. We got his pension and what he picks up, and I work sometimes for a lady in Grove Park Road. You know Mrs. Scrase, sir?—she gets me work like that sometimes. . . . Yuss, she lawst her only boy in the war."

Tib gazed into the fire.

The silence was broken by the noise of boots in the passage. "'Ere we are, Tib," called the voice of Joe Wylie. "*Here* we are, Colonel! Your Orderly Sergeant told me I was to

report to the Colonel at once. And have I come at the double? Not arf. Up for Orderly Room, as per usual, I s'pose."

He pushed open the door and entered. Joe, in an old blue suit and dusty bowler hat, seemed even shorter and stockier than he used to do in his khaki. And his long Roman nose seemed ruddier than in those days, and his skin more mottled and veined. His untidy hair and long loose moustache were certainly greyer. He gave one look at the visitor; then slammed his hat on to a table; threw wide his coat, thus unveiling an array of medals; shoved both hands into his trouser pockets, and said:

"Gawd's love!"

"Yes, it's me," smiled Tony, who had risen. "How are you, Joe?"

"Gawd . . . strike . . . me . . . blue!" said Joe. "Tib, do you know who this is? It's Captain O'Grogan as ever was! . . . Well! . . . Tib, go and make 'im a cuppa tea, for Christ's sake. . . . Oh, you mustn't mind my saying that, sir—gaw! I didn't see as you were a minister now. Where is it? Swilfrid's?"

"Yes."

"Law! Fancy! You a minister up at Swilfrid's! Tib, pop off to your cook-'ahse and make the best potta tea you done for a twelve-month. Jump to it, nah! We got some military discipline in this 'ahse, sir, whether I'm the C.O. or the missus. Gaw, sir, this 'as done me more good than a pint of stout! Sit dahn, sir. Sit *dahn*." They both sat down while Tib went off to the kitchen. "That's better; and what's wrong with gingering up the fire the first time you come into my little ole dug-out? Gather round the Tommy's Cooker, sir. Swilfrid's. That's Mr. Broadley's, isn't it? I don't know 'im—really. I ain't bin to church since that service at Ee-prez, jest before all the boys were killed. But swelp me bob, if I don't come along sometimes and hear *you*, sir! Jer remember that service in the medder behind Ee-prez, sir, and Padre Quickshaw and all! Law, sir; them were the days. That was Life, that was! J'ever see any of the boys now, sir?"

Tony said that he had not so far seen any of them, but that his chief purpose in coming to Thamesmouth was to find old friends again.

"Yuss," nodded Wylie, "there's a tidy few of the old

Fifteenth knocking arahnd here, sir. Aht o' work, most of 'em, but there! they'll be up in the air when I tell them that Captain O'Grogan of C Company's here in Thamesmouth. Christ! they were times, they were! Remember poor Mr. Hughes Anson, sir—he was a gen'l'man, he was—the bravest man I ever saw, and that pleasant with the boys! Many a time he's passed me at the cook-'ahse, or outside me dug-out, and always he says, 'It's a good war, Wylie,' and I says, 'Never a better, sir. Never a better. . . .' As always when he made a joke, Joe laid a bashful forefinger along his moustache and looked slyly at his listener. “. . . Yes, old Jerry did in a good one when they did him in. . . . Still . . .”

“But I thought you'd gone political,” Tony chaffed, “and didn't hold with war.”

“Oh, Tib's been talking, 'as she? Yuss, you're right, sir. I'm not saying it wasn't a *capittalists'* war. I'm not saying we weren't used as mincemeat because the big men wanted the markets. I'm not saying we weren't a lot of bloody mutts to fall for it like we did. But that's not to say I didn't enjoy it while it was on, is it, sir? But I tell you what: that little question isn't finished with yet. There's trouble brewin' in Old England. And we shall see it 'ere in Thamesmouth before we're very much older and past enjoyin' it. I hear a thing or two among the railway boys and the tramway boys.”

“Why, what's the trouble?”

“They don't reckon as they're gettin' a square deal. Your capittalists made the war and now they're going to use the bloody awful mess the world's in to break the Trade Unions and cut the boys' wages. And we just ain't 'avin' any of that, sir. We ain't playin' the mug's game twice. And when the trouble comes, sir, I shall be in it.”

“Don't get bitter, Joe,” laughed Tony. “I always thought you were one who couldn't do that.”

“Ah, it was different then, sir. Then it was me country against the 'Uns. I never 'ad no grouse against Fritz, but he arst for trouble and he got it. And now I've no grouse against the Masters, but they're out to down the Unions and they'll get it too. And as I tell you, sir: I'm standing in with the boys. Yuss, every time.”

Tony, seeing that the old fellow had heated, left the subject.

“Joe, does your wife know anything about Captain Scrase?”

Joe glanced up, alarmed and guilty.

"Why? She ain't bin talkin', 'as she?"

"No, but from her manner I suspected that she did."

"Well, sir . . ." He pulled up the knees of his trousers, and brushed both sides of his moustache with a knuckle. He gave a poke to the fire. "Well, I did tell her, sir, that time when I got 'ome on leave. But she's the only one I've ever told, and that's on my Bible oath. And I bin sore tempted to split sometimes. But I've remembered what the Colonel said, and you, sir; and I've thought of the pore old Alderman up yonder and his missus; and I've held on tight. As far as I know, sir, there's you knows, and I know, and Tib, and that's all—and *she* won't peach."

"Thank you, Joe. I'm glad to hear that."

"Nah, I shan't let on," said Joe after a silence.

Then Tib Wylie brought in a teapot and cups, and immediately Joe, jumping up, erected a screen of liveliness.

"'Ere's the Orderly Sergeant bringin' the dixies. Thank you, Sergeant. Got your canteen, sir? . . . There you *are*, sir. That's your ration. Any complaints?"

"Not one," said Tony, who had stood up too.

"No. Tib makes tea when she likes; none of your army stew. Well, sir, here's to it. Here's to your 'appiness and success in ole Thamesmouth."

"Thank you, Joe." Tony sipped his tea.

"Yuss, and here's to the Old Days. . . . And Absent Friends, sir, what? Mr. Hughes Anson. Little Willie Sparrer. . . . And pore old Art Webster."

"And Sergeant Jim Stott," said Tony.

"Yes, not arf! And Mr. Aylwin, and Mr. Wimborne and—and Another we know . . . Oh well . . ."

"And Mr. Moulden," added Tony.

"Yuss. Absent Friends, wherever they lie." Joe, who was quite as sentimental as his wife, drank again, and brushed his sleeve along his mouth. "And may we never let 'em dahn."

CHAPTER III

THE PEOPLE COME IN

THE new curate began his career in a spot-light of popularity. The worshippers at St. Wilfrid's were good-natured and easy-going folk, unless their prejudices were disturbed, and they would have been ready, with far less help than the Rev. Antony O'Grogan could give them, to pronounce him a great success and "one of the best we've ever had." But he could give them a deal of help towards settling in this comfortable conclusion. With his youthful face and hair grey over the ears; with his laughing eyes and friendly manner; with his slender figure, soldierly bearing and D.S.O., he entered upon his game with a flush of trumps in his hand. The Boys' Club liked him, the Men's Club respected him, the Girls' Club giggled in corners about him, the Sunday School teachers gathered round and gushed with him modestly, and Miss Pocock and her Society of Friendly Girls were sometimes a little coy with him, yet without sin. As for the Mothers, they frankly adored him. Alderman Scrase congratulated the Vicar on "an indubitable acquisition to the Parish"; and Mrs. Scrase echoed her husband's congratulations, as she echoed everything else that he said.

This popularity was very pleasing to Tony. Pleasing, that is, to his sensitiveness; less pleasing to his incisive mind. This chorus of approving voices came from West Thamesmouth and from West Thamesmouth only; and though there was no reason why he shouldn't love the good foggy-minded people of the western hill, he knew that he could give them nothing. They would be sitting in their church with their comfortable creeds about them, whether he was preaching in Thamesmouth or planting in Malaya. The only way he could give them anything would be to offend them vigorously and disturb their composure; and he feared he would shortly be doing this

If there had been any life in the restless hints which the war had sown in him he must let them drive him where they would. He must not allow popularity to lift his weapons from his hands.

But this attack would wait. For the present there was East Thamesmouth, and he could work in the fallow ground there, not offending the people but pleasing them. It was a very real thing in Tony's heart just now, his love of the common men of England. They were *real*, he would say; and would wonder what he meant by that.

And if anyone asked him what he meant, he would crumple his forehead and speak of a great friend of his, since killed, who, arguing on the slope of a Gallipoli bluff, and in a hundred other reeking spots, had taught him to hate all opaquely optimistic thinking and to crave reality. And it seemed to him now that the upper classes of England were fairly real, with their self-protecting Toryism, so open and unashamed, their aristocratic superiority to convention, and their simple creed of *noblesse oblige*. And the lower classes were more real, with their coarseness, humour, ignorance and goodwill. But the middle classes were far less real. He summed them up in a clumsy sentence: "They did not think what they truly thought; they thought what they thought people thought they ought to think." They had no courage to say aloud what their minds might suddenly present to them, however shocking it might be; they said only what they supposed a respectable person ought to say. So talk was unutterably dull with them, and real conversation impossible. They were not simple like the people above them and the people below them; nor solid like them. Unsure of themselves and unintegrated, they were fluid and viscid substance which shaped itself always to changing conventions without. Other and stronger people built these conventions and left them as soon as they had outlived their date; and they were always amazed, as they looked back from a considerable distance ahead, to see the excellent middle classes still surrounding and sticking to the last of their leavings.

Of such fluid and viscid stickers as these was the company at St. Wilfrid's.

Mr. Broadley, thought Tony, was an excellent Captain of his Company. His company had created him (though they did not know it) and were his matrix: he, in his turn, had created

them, and was their father ; and there never was a better bargain driven. Like people, like priest, quoth Hosea. Mr. Broadley meant well, but his mind was too timid and slack, and his body too limp and loose, to fight the fog that rolled down the hill from West Thamesmouth. Instead he gave it back to them in vague high-sounding sermons, and in vague "unexceptionable" conversations that had no vice in them to injure anyone and, as surely, no virtue to heal. Like people, like priest ; lackaday !

This desire in Mr. Broadley to give his children what they expected of him was splendidly illustrated, to the quaking amusement of his curate, by the change which overcame his language whenever he felt the floor of a pulpit beneath his feet, or the hassock of a prayer-desk against his knees. Then the current speech of the Thamesmouth drawing-rooms became a marvellous blend that rolled along, in a muddy but glistening grandeur, of the English of the Bible, the English of the poets, and the English of the more ponderous journals. When in the full purple of prayer or exhortation, "to" became "unto" ; "understand" appeared as "comprehendeth" ; "yes, dear people," became "yea, dear people," and "no, Lord" "nay, Lord" ; "meaning," for some reason, was extended into "meaning and significance" ; the King strutted as "Our Sovereign Lord and Monarch" ; Jesus moved sadly as "The Christ," "The Nazarene" ; trouble in the coalfields loomed up as "the dark clouds about us, O Lord, which menace the very fabric and structure of our civilization" ; and the questions of the day resounded through the church as "the fundamental issues that underlie our national life at this time."

His very pronunciation changed. "All," when Mr. Broadley was in high emotional state, showed a strange tendency to become "ull"—"Brethren, shall we ull now rise and sing a hymn" ; the holy Apostles, on the crest of a wave of very strong feeling, changed most distinctly into "Thy holy Aparcels, O Lord" ; and at times—at really stirring times—"Lord" enriched and strengthened itself into something very like "Lorder."

On the second Sunday of every month, at three o'clock in the afternoon, Mr. Broadley held a service which he called a "People's Service." It was addressed to those who did not

usually come to church ; the normal congregation not being accounted as of the People. In England, to be of the People, you must be weaker brethren, lax, fickle and unconverted ; you must be a formless multitude of creatures who live and browse outside the little clearing that parson or politician has made ; uncertain, coy and hard to please, you must be won, if won at all, by cajolery, titillation and bribes. The People's Service at St. Wilfrid's was a service of cajolery. Mr. Broadley, as he stood and addressed the People's Service, was more genial than at any other time. He perspired with geniality. He ensured that all the prayers and hymns were of a " popular " character—though God knows what that means. He—but unfortunately the People were not at their service ; not a dozen of them. The congregation was made up of loyal parishioners who were anxious to help the Vicar in this worthy attempt to catch the People. Those sad desiccated virgins who attended all his services were there, sprinkled as lonely units among the naked pews ; some of the old men were there, seating their lonely selves, after a curious fashion, near the companionship of a pillar ; a few of the pious youths were there, dotted among the corner seats, of which so many were available ; the lads of Mr. Brewer's Bible Class formed a goodly block in the front pews which the mere individuals were too shy to occupy ; Miss Pocock, all archness shed and a portentous solemnity indued, led in a necklace of Friendly or Rescued Girls ; and some of the sidesmen—usually it is to be feared the more officious of them—walked up and down the aisles, ready to extend a hearty welcome to the People, should any of the coy creatures come.

About a month after his arrival in Thamesmouth, and for the first time, Tony was the Special Preacher at the People's Service. The cajolery of the service had begun a week earlier ; it had blossomed into double-crown posters on the railings of the church which advertised " Special Preacher, Rev. Antony O'Grogan, B.A., D.S.O." ; and in smaller bills which drooped among the provisions in the shop windows. And now at five minutes to three on the Sunday the Special Preacher, already robed in surplice and scarf, looked from the vestry door, down the spaces of the church, to see in what strength the People had come to hear him. A soft sunlight streamed from the lancet windows on to an empty south aisle, but in the body of the church, between the arcaded pillars, a considerable

congregation was assembling. He detected quite a score of unfamiliar faces. And all the old friends were there: the faithful women, the lonely greybeards, the pious youths, Mr. Brewer and his lads, Miss Pocock and her girls. They had come to hear what the likeable new curate would make of his opportunity in the large freedoms of a People's Service. Alderman Scrase was not there, since he was emphatically not of the People; nor Mrs. Scrase either, since she was, or was not, whatever her husband was, or was not. But Mr. Bray moved ingratiatingly up and down the nave and showed the few strangers into pews.

Tony was about to turn back into the vestry and report to the Vicar within, when he heard the shuffle of many feet and the murmur of many voices at the west door. The faces of all the congregation swung round to this noise; and Mr. Bray hastened rapidly, but on soft feet, to meet it. It sounded as if some of the People were coming in.

The first to come in was Joe Wylie. He was tidier and cleaner than Tony had ever seen him, except in that photograph on his mantelshelf. He wore a black suit carefully brushed, and held a new bowler hat in his hand. His hair was oiled down and the ends of his moustache were waxed. Probably through embarrassment at where he was, and at the thought of his disciples crowding behind him, he wore a grin of exaggerated unconcern and swaggered a little as he marched up the nave. To Mr. Bray, who met him, and beckoned him to come forward, he said "Yuss" rather too loud. He whispered audibly to a grinning companion at his side that, *gaw!* it was Mr. Bray, the grocer in George Street. And he swaggered after this guide, brushing his moustache as he came.

Immediately behind Joe Wylie, but with no such uneasy swagger—indeed with some stateliness, as one who would have you know that she was well up in this church-going business—came Mrs. Tib Wylie, attired as if for a coster's wedding. Her hair, above all this fine and feathery grandeur, seemed more golden than ever. She held an umbrella aslant her arm, and a Bible, prayer book and hymn-book in her gloved fingers. And the expression she carried through the watching people was more solemn than that of Miss Pocock herself.

Behind this forging galleon, which clearly flew the admiral's

flag, whatever Joe Wylie may have imagined about his captaincy, came a fine flotilla of working men, some in ill-fitting dark clothes, some in coarse brown suits and week-day mufflers, and all with sheepish grins. Some had their wives with them, and one wife had a baby. Face after face Tony recognized as that of a man of the old Fifteenth, and his heart quickened. It melted. Mr. Bray, more impressed by this approach of the People than by anything that had happened in the church for many a long day, ushered Joe Wylie with a fat hand that was eloquent with brotherhood into the front pew of all; and Joe said "Yuss," and pushed along it. That he should forget that hassocks lay in the path to trip him proved that this was the first time that he had been to church for years; and that he should exclaim "Crikey!" as he stumbled over the first of them, and then allow a suppressed giggle to escape through his nose, proved that he had all the correct deportment to learn anew. The men behind him, in their embarrassment, tittered, and this made Joe still more inclined to laugh, so that he passed his fingers under both wings of his moustache to conceal the twisting of his mouth. Mrs. Wylie looked severe, and one felt that she was longing to say aloud, "Don't be a fool, Joe. Be'aive yerself, can't yer?" Joe sat down at the far end of the pew against a pillar, put his bowler hat under his seat, brushed both wings of his moustache again, and sat back to show that he was perfectly at home and at ease. The other men, not knowing any better, lounged into the rest of the pew and filled up the four pews behind, like a school of shepherded children. Mr. Bray, having seen his flock into these pews, pushed home his cuffs, buttoned his coat over a breast and bowels that were satisfied, and walked back to his place at the west door. And the children of the flock, left unshepherded, sat tightly together and tried, like their bell-wether, Joe Wylie, to appear at home and at ease.

But then Tib, knowing more about these matters than the rest, discomposed them all by kneeling on a hassock to say a preliminary prayer. At once some of the others, seeing that the admiral's flag had dipped and desiring to do everything in order, followed her example—outwardly at least. And then all their fellows, rather than be left conspicuously alone, with people kneeling on either side of them, sank likewise to their knees. Joe, who had turned round to ascertain what might mean this general collapse of his followers, hastily bent

himself forward and remained in this position till Tib gave the sign for a concerted movement backward.

When Tib rose refreshed and began to play with the laces about her bosom or pass her fingers under her hair, he straightened his back and brushed his hand along his moustache to show that he was quite unashamed at anything he might have done. He examined a grease stain on the lapel of his coat and tried to brush it away with his sleeve, but, achieving little success, dipped his forefinger in his mouth and wiped it off that way. He sniffed rather loudly, and quite without malicious intent, but Tib turned and looked reprovingly at him, and that made him want to laugh. He stifled the laugh, shifted uneasily in his seat, and opened a hymn-book : while a humorist in the rear muttered, "Nah then ! Smarten up in front there !" and the men near him giggled ; which brought round the head of Joe, who, as the guardian of decency, hissed at them : "Shurrup !"

Tony, at the vestry door, now became aware that the Vicar was by his side, watching with no little surprise this arrival of the People.

"Some of your friends, O'Grogan ?" he inquired, when the vestry door had closed on them.

"Yes. The old Fifteenth."

"Excellent !" said the Vicar, throwing his scarf over his surplice. "Excellent. Some of Our Returned Men. Shall we just——"

And he began the vestry prayer.

The Amen mumbled, the two clergy walked out of the vestry towards the stalls in the choir. The trained members of the congregation in the hinder seats rose to their feet with some little noise ; and all Joe Wylie's platoon, as one man, turned their heads to see what was afoot in the rear. Tib stood up proudly, thus giving them their lead ("How the hell," said Joe afterwards, "could the rest form platoon ?"), and they all stood with her, some leaning forward upon the pew as if faintly ashamed.

Mr. Broadley was now in the Vicar's stall, and Tony in the curate's opposite him. Mr. Broadley, after coughing, knelt to pray. The trained members knelt to pray too ; but Joe's crowd, unaware that there was prayer behind, just sat themselves down again. Presently the Vicar stood up, and, facing the congregation, swept all of them, old friends and new,

with never such a genial smile. And he cleared his throat and said :

“ Shall we ull rise and sing hymn one hundred and sixty-six ? ”

Mr. Broadley was not a little proud of the extempore prayers which he introduced into the People's Service. It was a somewhat bold and unorthodox step, he would say, but it had more Reality for the People, who would not be accustomed to the formal collects and prayers. If it offended a few of the strait-laced, well, he must be content to offend them, if thereby he might win the People. So now, the hymn over and all on their knees, he upraised his eyes to the roof, and proceeded to introduce a little Reality into the service.

“ O God our Father,” he prayed, “ look down upon us gathered together to worship Thee and to seek Thy help in all the ills that beset us and our national life at this time . . . whether industrial . . . social political . . . economic. Thou seest us, O Lord ; Thou lookest down upon us and seest us. And Thou understoodst . . . ” Mr. Broadley in extempore rhapsodies always experienced some difficulty with verbs in the second person singular. “ Let us first ask of Thee help and assistance in our social life . . . at this time. Keep far from us Industrial strife, O Lord ; help all of us, whether employers or employed, masters or men, rulers or ruled, mistresses or maid servants ”—he became quite sing-song—“ to do the work beneath our hand, not as unto men, but as unto Thee. Thus alone shall we achieve content, O Lord . . . Such a—such a view was never more needed among our people than at this time, when our beloved land is threatened with industrial conflict, brother taking up the sword against brother and forgetting that they fought side by side, shoulder to shoulder, in the Great War, so recently concluded. This is not according to Thy Will, O Lord. Thou willedst not that we strive one with another, but that we dwell together in unity, striving to bring Thy Kingdom about in this our beloved country—to build Jerusalem in England's green and pleasant land. Thou hast richly blest this our nation, lifting it to a great place among the peoples of the world, and recently Thou hast brought it out of great tribulation, wherein its very existence was threatened, O Lord. We thank Thee for this,

and we pray Thee to help us to be worthy of our England, this sceptred isle, this royal throne of Kings, this little gem set in a silver sea. Do Thou help us, one and all, to be equal—*adequate*, O Lorder—to this great hour in our country's history; do Thou help us to seek not our own ends, but to consider the whole community and to strive to understand the issues which underlie our national life at this time. Yea, Lord, that is what we need. Service, not self. Each of us has their own work in front of us"—"each," like the second person singular, was very apt to entangle the feet of Mr. Broadley—"grant that we do it, not for the profit that it will bring us, but for its own sake. Drive far from us all thoughts of profit, so that we make The Thing before us, not for any such vulgar rewards, but only that it should be well done. Help us to make it for its own sake—for the sake of the Thing Itself. *The Thing Itself*, O Lord our God! And if, even then, we fail of our perfect mark, grant that we be able to say with Robert Browning in his famous poem 'Rabbi Ben Ezra':

' Not on the vulgar mass,
Called "work," must sentence pass,
But all, the world's coarse thumb
And finger failed to plumb,
This I was worth to God . . .

or even as Bernard Shaw, a very different writer, says elsewhere: 'This is the true joy of life, to spend yourself in the service of a great ideal.' These men, whatever else they may have said—and there is much of their Written Word to which as Christian men and women we can never subscribe—but when they speak like this, O Lord, they speak as Thy Prophets."

At this point the Vicar suspected, what Tony had perceived long before, that his words were ceasing to be a prayer to God and were becoming an address to the people. Not to say an essay in literary criticism. So he hastily recovered his true orientation; and in his ensuing words explained to God, and to the People, that he had not really gone astray.

"Yea, Lord, here we are, Thy Church, gathered in prayer at Thy feet, realizing that we have a great part to play in our national life. We are seeking Thy help in this matter. We desire to ask Thee to help us, as a Church, to guide and influence the nation aright. And now, having considered our social duties, let us consider our personal lives, O Lord. And here what we all need so sorely is, as we saw earlier, that we should

abandon the pursuit of all selfish ends, and live only to serve. Naught for self, and all for others. Thou camest among us to show us the way——”

Having quite forgotten that he had begun by addressing God the Father, he was now in the full tide of a prayer to God the Son.

“It is Thy spirit, O Lord, that we need so much at this time; the spirit of The Christ. In all our relations one with another, as husbands, as wives, as fathers, as little children, help us to remember always that the only happiness is giving. Help us to say Not I, but Her . . . but Him . . . but Them. . . . May this be especially the case in our relations with our children, our little ones, on whom the future of our country depends.”

Never so successful when in rapture about the personal life as when in rapture about the national life, Mr. Broadley had safely footed his way back to that easier forest where the roads were so much broader and the long ruts of previous orators were all ready for his feet to tread. He prayed for Our Sovereign Lord the King, our statesmen and ministers, our soldiers, sailors and airmen, our nursing sisters and all who minister to the sick and dying. A pleasant and familiar rut led him to our municipal life, and he expounded to God the duties of all his listeners as units in the corporate life of our burrow. Then, after lowering his eyes from Heaven to his wrist-watch, he received the happiest of his inspirations. He upraised his eyes again and prayed for Tony.

“And now, O Lord, do thou look upon him who shall speak to us in this quiet afternoon hour. Yea, Lord, do Thou endue him with power that he may touch and quicken our languid hearts. He is one whom Thou has brought out of a Great Experience, with his life, and not without distinction. He has served on many fronts of the Great War. As a combatant officer——” Wearying a little, he suffered his prayer to sag down into a chairman’s introduction of the speaker——“he has suffered for many years by the side of his men, and he knows that nothing will heal the wounds of our stricken world save Love, and the Gospel of the Nazarene. So he has elected to become Thy minister and servant, and now he will speak to us. Do Thou pour Thy grace upon him that he be but a vehicle of Thy truth. Do Thou charge him with a Message”——Mr. Broadley was recovering the afflatus——“so that out of the abundance of his heart the mouth may speak. And do

Thou give to us all open hearts and listening ears that we may be greatly profited and go out from our midst into our daily labours, enriched . . . strengthened . . . fortified . . . purified . . . blessed. Amen, O Lord. . . . Amen"—and on the full-flowing river of his emotion, Mr. Broadley was carried to two more Amens. "Amen. . . . Amen."

He rose and faced the people, the richness of his prayer still mellowing him like wine. And in this mellow mood he smiled and said :

"Shall we ull rise and sing hymn five hundred and forty?"

Tony had been listening to the Vicar's prayer in amazement and delight. As the wordy stream flowed on, now muddy, now clear, now breaking over some awkward rocks, now pouring towards God the Father, now divagating towards God the Son, now spreading out in a flood over its audience in the pews, he had been hard put to it to control the laugh that trembled beneath his surplice and cassock. But gradually the laughter became irritation. His eyes turned towards Joe Wylie and his flock. He knew them well. Simple people, and always impressed by fluent and sonorous speech, they were satisfied that the clergyman's prayer was beautiful, and were not attending. Joe was using the long tedious interval as an opportunity for cleaning his teeth with a match-end. Tib, resting her round face in the cup of her hands, while her mouth drooped, was using the time to brood over the worries of her household. Often she put her fingers into her golden hair and lifted its weight, and her hat's weight, off a weary head. The mother with the baby was dandling it up and down because it showed a tendency itself to break into ejaculatory prayer. The other men and women were lolling forward and filling up their boredom with varied occupations; some fiddling with the hymn-books, some trimming their nails, and some day-dreaming. Pity blent with Tony's irritation. Were the Vicar's woolly generalizations to be all that the People's Service could give to these simple folk who had come, so richly bedight, to hear what it might be that the spokesmen of God were eager to say? No: he himself must redress the balance. He must mount that pulpit and introduce a little Reality into the service.

He put his hand into his cassock pocket and drew out the notes of his sermon. They were many, and closely written ; for Tony, not yet accustomed to preaching, liked to feel that at least ninety per cent. of his actual words were available, in an emergency, beneath his eyes. Moreover, he had conned the larger part of them by heart ; and for this reason they suddenly seemed wooden and lifeless. Oh, why couldn't he pour out, naturally, easily, and with the vehemence of conviction, some truth that all his blood and heart endorsed ? *Was* there anything that he believed like that ? Yes—oh, yes—for years it had possessed him : it had entered his heart, bringing its sorrow with it, that day when Peggy went out of his life on the arm of Michael Saffery, her husband ; it had risen like a flood in him that day when the glorious pageantry of the Desert Column marched forward to the capture of El Arish ; it had broken him that day when he knelt in the 'Dangerous Ward of No. 201, by the side of his dying men—the certainty that nothing mattered quite so much in life as sweet human relationships ; that the more you had of them the better ; that all the other things men desired—fame, and wealth, and comfort—were of little worth if these were missing ; and that you simply couldn't have them unless you yourself were capable of giving largely of yourself. You might want and want and want, but you would only get back what you gave. This was what, in some way or another, he would bring out of his heart and force across to Joe Wylie and his friends. Ideas and arguments leapt into mind. Some of them, so vigorous they were, would offend the Vicar and the old congregation, but it couldn't be helped. The attack was going to begin.

Hurriedly, while the Vicar babbled on, and while the hymn was being sung, he pencilled words and sentences on the back of his notes. And he prayed to be helped.

The hymn was in its last verse ; the Vicar, still impressed by his prayer and very happy, was singing it at the top of his voice, and the curate was mounting the pulpit with an angry resolve to bring a little Reality into the service.

The Amen died away, and the people sat down.

It would be impossible to give a verbatim report, or even a coherent précis, of Tony's sermon that Sunday afternoon. He himself could never remember the words which he used, nor the sequence of his arguments ; he knew only that the

whole sermon was vilely phrased and vilely organized, but that, if it had neither form nor dignity, it had passion. He knew that all the faces of Joe Wylie's company stared up at him; that Miss Pocock stared; that Mr. Bray stared; and that the Vicar stared, as well he might—for inasmuch as the Vicar's prayer (or exhortation or discussion or whatever the extraordinary compost might be called) was the last thing his curate had heard, and inasmuch as his curate was now speaking extempore and hotly, the sermon in more than one place spluttered into a vigorous denial of some point which the Vicar had explained with much beauty to God. Well might the Vicar gape.

Tony, up there in his pulpit, was conscious all the time of two Tonys: one, a hurt poet who was pouring out a maddening conviction that nothing counted in the long run but love; and the other, a little seated watcher within him who was at once impishly delighted and nervously alarmed at the shocking indiscretions of his friend the poet.

He heard himself declare that the only way the Church could help the national life was by working revolutions in individual souls. And thereupon he heard himself attack the idea that "Naught for self and all for others" was the truth for most of his hearers this afternoon. If it were, why didn't he give up all that he'd got to the unemployed and walk barefoot through the streets of Thamesmouth? (And in this connexion he had reason to suppose that he became flippant.) For heaven's sake, he said, let them get out of a vapoury idealism on to the solid ground of reality. Some men were called to the extremes of self-sacrifice, and he bowed his head before them; they were the geniuses of sanctity, but nothing could make him believe that himself, or most of his hearers, were called to such heights as that. He would be perfectly honest with them and admit that he was going to keep his few stocks and shares, and his five per cent. dividends. No, it seemed clear to him that for normal Christian men and women the true nobility was a happy harmony between self-preservation and self-giving, with the bias leaning always towards self-giving. The more the bias leant that way the better, no doubt. And that was what he was going to ask them to attempt: a steady increase, day by day, of the bias towards giving. Take an example: if an industrial conflict arose, they might be doing quite right in not allowing themselves to be exploited, if they were convinced that their masters would only take advantage of too much

self-abnegation ; but let them go about it with more than half an eye on the good of their fellows.

Many other shocking things did Tony say. He said : " And don't think all the time that you're such damned fine fellows. You'll begin to look like damned fine fellows when you begin to say, ' Well, I'm not sure that *I'm* much to write home about, but my mates are good lads and deserve better treatment, so I'm standing in with them.' " He said : " And I always reckon, myself, that it's a dangerous thing to say that the only happiness is in giving, not in receiving. Christ had far too much sense to put it like that. He did not say that there was no happiness in receiving ; He said it was happier to give than to receive. Of *course* it's a happy thing to receive, a perfectly delightful thing—I love it—but it's happier—oh, so much happier—such wonderful happiness, when you really see the truth of it, to *give*. My God, if we could only produce as far as we can, throughout our lives, that joy which comes when we give something to a friend, why, we should really be joyous from the cradle to the grave ! And that brings me again to my everlasting point, that nothing, nothing, *nothing* matters very much when the years are passing away from you except human relationships, or in a sweeter word, love. That's all I want to get into you this afternoon. If you've accepted that—and every one of you knows in his secret heart that it's blindingly true ; and if you are making up your minds as you sit here and listen to me, that, oh ! you'll do something about it ! why, then, you are not far from the Kingdom of God. Oh, *do* do something about it ! I am offering the choice between a wretched, drifting loneliness that will not bear thinking of, and joys that can be almost too great to be borne. If you make the wrong choice you are not so much sinners as fools. Fools to choose a hell of loneliness instead of a heaven of love ! And you build your heaven about you just in proportion as you give. I know this is not the whole truth, and that I've said it all atrociously ; but it's quite a lot of the truth, and it'll do for this afternoon. Take it ; take it, for God's sake, for your friends' sake, and lastly for your own sake. . . . God bless you, and come again next time."

Tony had finished—finished lovingly and angrily. He turned, wiped his forehead, and walked wearily, stumbling once, down the stairway of the pulpit.

The Vicar rose in his stall, and turned towards the people. A sad man, he inquired of them sadly :

"Well ; and shall we ull sing hymn one hundred and ninety-three ? "

When they were back in the vestry the Vicar's silence was oppressive. As he threw off scarf, hood and surplice, his resentment and confusion seemed to hang like a damp aura round his head. And Mr. Bray and a sidesman, as they counted the money in the collection plate, were oppressively silent too. As for Tony, he was both pleased and perturbed ; pleased to think that he had forced out of his heart something that was good, and perturbed to remember that more than once, in that effervescent discourse, he had been tactless, fretful and unmannerly. Mr. Bray and the sidesman departed, after a cold "good afternoon" to him, and a sympathetic—an excessively sympathetic—"good afternoon" to the Vicar. Tony began to whistle the last hymn to himself, to show that he was in his happiest vein to-day ; and prepared to follow them ; but the Vicar called out :

"Just a minute, O'Grogan."

"Yes, Vicar ? " Tony's raised eyebrows suggested that he could imagine no reason why the Vicar should bid him pause.

"I *must* say, O'Grogan—I mean, I really can't—I mean, you must see that that sermon of yours was rather distressing to—to myself and to many others. It was not at all the sort of thing that I expected from you. Not at all. To begin with—to take a very small point—the slang and the slovenly expression ! It's not good enough, O'Grogan ! The Clergy of the Established Church, I always say, are, to a certain extent, the guardians of the King's English."

"Good lord ! Are they ? "

"Yes. Yes, certainly. But we'll leave that. What good do you think you are going to do by a wild, unprepared harangue like that ? . . . It's not good enough, O'Grogan. . . . I'll guarantee you've offended a great many people, and we don't want to offend anybody."

"I should think it would do some of them good," said Tony.

"Please let me finish. You must have offended the old members of the congregation, and you went out of your way,

I thought, to abuse those—those new friends of ours sitting in front. I can't see what's gained by it."

"Only that it may be damned good for their souls."

"There! I don't think that words like 'damned good' are suitable to the House of the Lord. It's *not* good for them to be offended and driven away; we should treat them with infinite gentleness, so as to hold them, and then——"

"Excuse me, Vicar: I have met one padre in my life who was successful with men like them—a fellow called Quickshaw—and he knew that the last thing they want is to be buttered——"

"'Buttered'! . . ."

"Yes; flattered—oiled. Instead, he just told them what he thought of them in their own language, putting plenty of kick into it—and by their own language I mean their whole mode of thinking, which is bitter on the surface and quite soft underneath—and they trusted him for an honest man and an intelligible one, and not only listened to him, but quite often got busy and did what he told them——"

"Yes, well, we don't want any methods like that here. I hope we shan't quarrel, O'Grogan, but if we are to work amicably together, we must understand each other."

"Which means, Vicar, not only that I must understand you, but that you must understand me."

"Eh, what? Yes: to a certain extent, yes." Mr. Broadley did not seem sure that it meant that. "But I am the captain of this ship, and the sooner we are clear about that the better. You must leave me to decide what sort of language I desire spoken in my pulpit, and what sort I won't tolerate."

Tony, walking up and down, strove to get a rein upon his temper by reminding himself that he was a tolerant fellow, much wiser than Broadley; and when he had got this pleasing bit between his teeth, he turned and said:

"All right, Vicar. I'm—I'm sorry if I lost control of my words once or twice—I think I did—but when I saw all those men in front, I abandoned the sermon I had prepared and tried to give them something for themselves. It wasn't easy, getting it all out on the spur of the moment."

Mr. Broadley was mollified. He liked everyone to be happy, and therefore could never bear that anyone should be apologizing to him.

"Thank you, O'Grogan," he said. "Thank you—er—I

am sure that if you exercise just a little more moderation I shall find your language and your ideas quite unexceptionable."

They parted at the church gates, Tony going north up St. Wilfrid's Road, and Mr. Broadley south to his Vicarage. And, as Tony strode on, he grimaced at the future doubtfully. Some of the fat had already splashed into the fire; was it not inevitable that a whole spluttering panful should one day follow it?

Yea, Lord.

CHAPTER IV

SUPPER AT THE SCRASES'

"**S**ANCTITY," thought Tony, standing on the pavement one day, after he had breathed several weeks of the pleasant St. Wilfrid's fog, "would enable a man to endure, or, failing sanctity, humour." And since in his case sanctity had not paraded its forces in any great strength as yet, and he doubted most heartily if it ever would do so, he had best mobilize all his reserves of humour. No doubt in an extreme Anglo-Catholic system, such as Peggy's, where there were rites which only a clergyman could perform, he could have been a fairly useful instrument and worth his pay; and in an extreme Anglo-Protestant system, with its stern taboos, he would have had a way of life to preach and to live; but in this formless atmosphere of St. Wilfrid's ("this Broadleyspeaking Christianity," as he called it), God help us, he had need of extraordinary patiences if he were to breathe it, do an honest job, and be efficient. Wherefore, since sanctity was not on the horizon, fall in, laughter! Tony issued this order on a Monday morning, as he came away from a staff meeting at the Vicarage. There had been that in the staff meeting which provoked such thoughts.

But it is often easier to issue an order than to ensure that it is obeyed. Unfortunately there was a combative Irishman in Tony, who sat the same bench most inamicably with the man of patiences; and very often, before one could stop him, this Irishman had shouldered his wiser partner to the floor, and was up and arguing with the Vicar or some other offender. Not six days after the order had gone out—on the Sunday evening when Honor and he were bidden for supper to the Scrases'—the Irishman and the wise man were at issue again, the latter pulling the former down as fast as he stood up.

Tony and Honor arrived before the Vicar and Miss Pocock,

who had also been bidden to the meal. They were shown in to the drawing-room, and Honor immediately sat down upon a sofa and apparently thought of nothing.

For a moment Tony, wearied with the day's work, felt unreasonably angry with her for sitting down and thinking of nothing. She should have cast her eyes around this remarkable drawing-room and drawn a hundred-and-one inferences from it. It was utterly untouched by any ideas that had visited the world in the last fifty years. It was unaware that the English were awake at last to a sense of colour and pattern and form. Look at its water-colours in gilt frames, its chairs and sofa in timid-hued cretonnes, its heavy brocade curtains and long lace ones, its grand piano covered with Indian shawls and silver-framed photographs, its tables, stools and knick-knacks, and its tall palm. One was intelligent in so far as every object in the world was a window through which one could see interesting or amusing significances, and unintelligent in so far as the windows had their blinds drawn. This room was full of windows. Was Honor a little unintelligent sometimes?

He suppressed a rebuke and wandered round the room, examining pictures and ornaments. Suddenly he paused before the mantelpiece and studied the photograph which corresponded to that in Joe Wylie's room. It had been framed in silver and elevated to the dignity of its own little easel. Across one corner of the frame was stretched the purple and white ribbon of the Military Cross.

"H'mmm," he murmured. "Honor."

"Yes, Tony?"

"This is Kit Scrase. Only, heavens! he looks so much younger here."

Honor jumped up to look at the portrait. She had heard such happy, glowing things of her husband's friend, Kit Scrase.

"Tony, what a beautiful face he's got!"

"Yes. . . . How the deuce he managed to spring from this silly old couple——"

"Sh! Tony. . . . I think they're adorable, both of them. Mr. Scrase is a lamb."

"A mutton-headed old sheep, my dear. So's the dowager."

"P'r'aps so. But they're good and kind."

"Oh, yes, good, kind old sheep—up to a point. Though I don't see how stupid people can ever be really kind."

"But why?"

"Hush, hush! Here are your lambs."

Mr. and Mrs. Scrase came in; and as Tony shook hands with his host, he was thinking that he certainly had a very fine narrow head and his fleece was excellent. Mr. Scrase had exchanged the morning coat for a square-cut jacket of black velvet, but otherwise he still wore the uniform that duty demanded: striped trousers, patent boots, high stiff collar and big black tie. And his little quiet old lady matched him, in her black silk gown trimmed with white, her golden chains and her sparkling rings.

"The Vicar will be with us shortly," said the Alderman.

"And Miss Pocock," added his wife.

"Yes," conceded Mr. Scrase, who had not thought Miss Pocock worthy of a special mention.

"Yes, we asked Miss Pocock to come along too," explained Mrs. Scrase.

They all sat down, and a dull talk flitted from chair to chair. In answer to some respectful questions from the curate, Mr. Scrase published a series of heavy pronouncements, and Mrs. Scrase, if appealed to, echoed them. Honor spoke hardly at all. Then, quite unwittingly, Tony gave the conversation life by alluding to the portrait of Kit. This seemed to touch the mother's lips as with a live coal from the altar; and she shed her subordination and became the chief talker. Her husband left the floor to her, sitting with his hands on his knees and nodding an occasional endorsement of her praises, or staring sadly in front of him. It was curious: Kit being the subject, the echo changed places with its principal; the mother talked and talked of the dead boy, while the father sat still, only answering his wife's, "Isn't that so, Christopher?" with a "Yes, my dear," or "Yes . . . yes, always." The mother was so full of her subject, and it was flowing out of her so gently and happily, that she seemed almost distressed at its interruption when the Vicar and Miss Pocock entered.

Mr. Bradley, having no idea that he had broken the happy flow of Mrs. Scrase, rubbed his hands together and was hearty.

"Aha! Another day's work done! Well, O'Grogan, I always think Sunday evening's the best evening in the week, don't you?"

But why? Tony saw no reason why Sunday evening should be a better evening for the Vicar than any other evening of

the week. Unless, to be sure, Sunday was the only day when the Vicar did eight hours' work and rested at eventide. But that wasn't what Mr. Broadley had meant. He had meant to suggest that seven days of fierce, unremitting labour had now reached their culmination, and one could enter a little valley of peace before another fierce week began. What was the sense of serving up such unreal stuff to his curate, who *knew*, who knew that, if it were not for the committees, conferences, and public meetings which Mr. Broadley enjoyed as much as a boy enjoys his games, he would have been at a loss how to fill up the hours between Monday morning and Saturday night? When would Mr. Broadley perceive that his curate wasn't blind?

"Yes, I think it is a good evening," said Tony.

"Oh, I *love* Sunday evening," gushed Miss Pocock, and executed a little skip and dance. "I don't know why it is, but I always feel exceptionally lively on Sunday evenings. I suppose it's a naughty little reaction after so much solemnity. Do you feel like that, Mr. O'Grogan? I believe you do!" She pointed at him an arch, accusing finger. "Yes, I believe you do! You look so thoroughly mischievous."

"Well, shall we all go down to supper?" said Mr. Scrase.

"Yes, I've no great quarrel with that suggestion," agreed the Vicar. "In fact, I think it's an excellent suggestion, don't you, O'Grogan?"

"Yes, I think we're all here," said Mrs. Scrase, who was not easily jocose.

"And you'll have to forgive me if I eat rather largely," added the Vicar, rubbing his hands together again. "I am quite hungry after the day's work."

Miss Pocock gently touched his arm and guided him to the door. "Was he hungry, poor darling? He shall be fed."

There was no doubt that Miss Pocock was in the best of spirits. She looked back at Honor and Tony, and called: "Come along, people. Let's all be thoroughly greedy. Do let's."

"Ah, the sweet thing!" whispered Tony to Honor, who giggled; and they all went down to the dining-room.

About the Scrases' dining-room there was a heavy brownness. The colours in the carpet all blent to brown; the colours in the curtains all blent to brown; the wallpaper was of a red that feared to be itself and approximated to brown; the

pictures on the walls were brown engravings. Nowhere was there a pure colour. The Scrases banished pure colours as rather violent and vulgar things; and probably they were quite unaware that the inheritors of a new world were experimenting with bright paint and finding it cheerful. If they had been told that there were respectable householders to-day whose furniture was pillar-box red or bird's-egg blue, they would have been scandalized, and have affirmed that their rooms must look like the vestibule of a cinema; and, in saying this, they would have supposed that they had condemned the rooms for ever. It would not have occurred to them that the vestibule of a cinema might be a much more cheerful place, and even a much more artistic one, than their own brown dining-room.

Similarly, their table was laid in an old fashion, its cut glass and massive silver standing on a shining cloth of Irish linen. An obsequious manservant, and a maid in a black dress and white apron, waited near the huge brown sideboard. A huge glass-fronted bookcase, filled with bound volumes of *Blackwood's*, *Punch* and William Black's novels, looked down upon the loaded table. It was a room that reminded Tony of his childhood and a Kensington that was dead.

The Alderman put Honor on his right and Miss Pocock on his left; and his wife took the Vicar to her right and Tony to her left.

"That puts husband and wife together," giggled Miss Pocock. "They mustn't quarrel. And I shall have the Vicar. Come along, Vicar-man."

Over the soup, Mrs. Scrase took up again the subject of her boy. She described to Tony the appalling hardships of his life on the Gallipoli peninsula—and never once did her imagination suggest to her that this Mr. O'Grogan, who had been an officer of the same company as Kit, had endured precisely the same afflictions as he. Somewhat chafed by this dullness, Tony did once say, "Yes, I know. I was there;" but she looked at him and did not seem at all convinced that this young clergyman sitting in her chair could have suffered all that Kit suffered. So she went on to tell Tony all about the evacuation of Gallipoli. These were the years just after the war, when talkers, having got on to that inexhaustible subject, did not leave it for the rest of the evening. And one remark of hers was indeed a window through which he could

see the real Mrs. Scrase, and her inability, despite all, to conceive what the war had been.

"You know, Mr. O'Grogan," she said, "I don't like to think it of our rulers, but I feel that they published quite a lot of untruths about that evacuation. Once when Kit was here on leave, my husband said how wonderful it was that they should have got all those men off the Peninsula without a single casualty, and Kit said, 'Is that the official story they published?' and when we said yes, he looked quite angry and—you must forgive me using the word—he said, 'Well, it was a damned lie.' And Kit wasn't usually a swearing boy."

Unwisely Tony burst into a laugh. "Was that all he said?"

"Oh, but Kit was never a swearing boy," Mrs. Scrase repeated earnestly.

"No." Tony, recovering his wisdom, allowed her to believe it.

"No; he always had too much good taste for that. And I don't believe, myself, that bad language was characteristic of the majority of our men either. All the officers that I met seemed to be exceedingly quiet and well-bred young men. And the privates too."

"Of course!" This was a gun from the Alderman, who, hearing his wife's words, opened fire from his end of the table. His wife had reminded him of a scandal that he loved to silence, so he proceeded to tell Tony the real facts about the men at the front. "It's perfectly scandalous the deliberate attempt that people are making now to represent our men as a set of foul-mouthed blasphemers. They were nothing of the sort. They were as quiet and orderly an army as ever took the field. The British Army was, in my judgment, an army of gentlemen."

Nobody likes to be informed authoritatively about matters on which he thinks himself an expert; and certainly not the Irishman in Tony, who was pricked at once to utterance.

"But they *were* foul-mouthed and blasphemers," he said. "You may not like to think it, but they were."

"*Chut*," snapped the Alderman.

"That isn't to say you're not right, on the whole, when you call them an army of gentlemen. But I don't see why they shouldn't be both."

"But that's nonsense," insisted the Alderman. "No gentleman is ever foul-mouthed. And blasphemy is unthinkable to him. Isn't that so, Vicar?"

"Of course," stuttered the Vicar. "Certainly. . . . Yes, thank you, Mrs. Scrase, I *will* have a little more. . . . But I think I see what O'Grogan means."

"I don't," assured Mr. Scrase. "If a man's foul-mouthed, he's not a gentleman, and there's an end of it. At all costs let's be logical."

"Oh——" Tony was just going to say, "Oh, hell!" but saved himself in time. "I don't want to shock you all, but I beg leave to state that I used some very obscene language in the army——"

"Oh, you naughty man!" interjected Miss Pocock.

"—and, what's more, I frequently blasphemed. We all did."

Miss Pocock could not laugh at this.

"I hardly knew a man who didn't; and it didn't seem to matter very much."

"Not *matter*?" echoed Mrs. Scrase. "Not *matter*, Mr. Grogan? Don't the commandments of God matter? 'Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord Thy God in vain'—can you get away from that?"

"Oh——" began Tony impatiently, but he rumbled his hair, and got control of himself again. "Oh, but—I dunno—honestly, Mrs. Scrase, if you'd had to flounder through mud with ninety pounds of equipment on your back, and the rain pouring down your neck, and a gas-mask pinching your nose and shells bursting all round you, I believe *you'd* have sworn. It's not the swearing that's to blame but the war that caused it."

"The war was a righteous war," boomed the Alderman. "Will you have a little cold beef, or a little cold turkey, Vicar? If ever there was a righteous war in history, the one just concluded was it. Bring me the steel, Jenkins; this knife is blunt as usual. It seems to be the fashion now, not only to throw mud at our splendid men, but to besmirch the cause for which they died."

"Ah, no, surely not," protested the Vicar. "O'Grogan wasn't saying that."

"No, no," breathed Miss Pocock.

"Not O'Grogan, perhaps. But that is what much of this pacifist talk amounts to." He began to sharpen his knife, and, raising his eyes from the task, stared, unseeing, at something beyond that room and far away. "And I submit, if you will pardon my mentioning it, that such a contention is an insult to those of us who gave our all."

The Vicar mumbled some sympathy; Mrs. Scrase touched her eyes with a handkerchief; and Miss Pocock directed her eyes to her plate, where she was using her knife as delicately as an artist uses a pencil.

"My boy was all in all to us," continued the speaker, now carving the turkey, "but I say here and now that I do not regret having been asked to give him up for my country's sake, because I believe, and I shall always believe, that I gave him to a good cause."

"That is certain, Scrase," said the Vicar softly.

"Yes . . . oh, yes," murmured Miss Pocock.

Tony said nothing. The words, "Did your Kit approve of the war?" had come near his lips, but he held them back. And not only because he had a real admiration for the simple probity of his host, but also because there hung around the memory of his dead friend an atmosphere of quiet sacredness which could always touch him to wisdom. He withdrew into himself and into thoughts of the past; and suddenly he remembered Kit saying after a dazzling argument under the Gallipoli stars: "I never argue with my people at home: it's no good hurting them, so perhaps that's why I work it off on you, old man."

All seemed to have tacitly agreed that the conversation had best move away from the ghost of Kit Scrase.

"No," said the father. "No. Nothing can reason me out of my conviction that our army, on the whole, was an army of Christian gentlemen."

"And I should be the last to attempt to do so, sir," said Tony. "It's probable, however, that I interpret your terms differently. Let me tell you a story that'll justify my meaning further. May I, sir?"

The Alderman spread an assenting hand.

"Well, what I am trying to say is that the moral law is relative, and in conditions like those of Gallipoli or France we could not condemn the men for blasphemy and we might even applaud them for stealing——"

"*Stealing?*" echoed Mrs. Scrase.

"Yes; only we didn't call it 'stealing'; we called it 'lifting.' And it wasn't one another's property that we lifted, but the Government's. The men lifted that whenever they could, and I suggest that they were often right."

"I cannot feel that stealing is justified ever——ever," said Mrs. Scrase.

"Well, hear my story. Once when our Company headquarters was in Leigh Ravine on Gallipoli, and our dug-outs were dotted all down the slope of the bluff, a very young subaltern called O'Connor joined us. It was just after the Great Blizzard had burst over the Peninsula, and the snow, I remember, was driving in his face as he came up the track to report to head-quarters. I am afraid we were all too frozen to look after him, so we told him to make himself a dug-out and call again in the morning. You see, there was no war on Gallipoli while the blizzard was raging; it had just frozen hard. So young O'Connor trudged off, and, as he was much too new to steal for the good of his country, he dug himself the most miserable little hole instead of a proper dug-out, and covered it with his single ground-sheet to keep out the snow and the icy wind. Needless to say, he was very quickly soaked to the bone and chilled to the marrow. Then our Padre came along, to visit a new-comer—and Padre Quickshaw, I must tell you, was the most—oh, well, but we'll leave that—and when he saw this poor little shivering rat of an O'Connor, he called him all sorts of names and demanded why he didn't at once lift some ground-sheets from the Quartermaster's stores and some wooden beams from the Sapper's Dump, and so preserve himself from pneumonia for the good of his country. He said, 'You little idiot! You'll never have such a chance in your life as you've got now. All the Dump wallahs are frozen, or they've got their heads under about six blankets. Go and take what you want.' The boy said he didn't like to, so Quickshaw said 'Pooh!' and disappeared. In about half an hour he returned with four new ground-sheets under one arm, and a bale of sandbags under another, and a fine beam in each hand; and he tossed these down in front of the youth, and said, 'There! Make yourself a proper dug-out, and don't be a bloody fool.'"

The adjective shivered the room. At the last moment Tony, as an artist, had been quite unable to spoil his story by omitting it.

"I am only telling you what he actually did say," he apologized, "and he was a padre."

"I don't think anything can justify stealing," repeated Mrs. Scrase.

Now there is something inordinately vexing in coming up against the buffers like this, just when you think that you have put up a most cogent piece of argument. Impatience surged

in Tony, but he would have mastered it, had not Mrs. Scrase at that instant turned and spoken to Honor.

"You agree with me, don't you, Mrs. O'Grogan? You agree that stealing must be a sin, in any circumstances whatever. Surely?"

And Honor, either out of timidity or out of slackness, replied:

"It's certainly rather dangerous to think anything else."

This maddened him, and he was driven, for his own relief, to argue further.

"Well, lying?" he demanded, with a militant note. "What about lying? Doesn't the larger truth often require that we lie for the good of our country?"

This being certainly picturesque, the Alderman was prepared to pass it, as an examiner might pass a dubious but not wholly damnable candidate.

"It is just possible, I will admit, that in extreme cases one might have to lie for the national good. But not for individual good. No, that's the difference." He seemed quite pleased with his clear thinking. "We may sometimes speak an untruth to save the country from danger, but not, in my judgment, to save an individual from punishment or pain."

Tony glanced sharply at him; an involuntary glance, for these had been strange, rather terrible, words to come from Alderman Scrase. When he spoke again he knew that he had stepped on to treacherous ground, but, understanding his host and hostess, he felt sure that he was safe there. It was safest, perhaps, to speak like this.

"But, sir, take the case of men who were shot for cowardice—or something like that. The Army in its mercy reported that they were 'missing.' That was a lie to save the individual from pain. Do you suggest that it wasn't justified?"

Before he answered, the Alderman signalled to the manservant to remove the joint. Then, leaning stiffly back in his chair and holding the lapels of his velvet coat, he gave his judgment.

"I suppose I should do my best to keep such terrible information from the parents, but not to the extent of lying. No, in my judgment, you are starting on a very dangerous slope when you begin to play ducks and drakes with truth."

"And I quite agree with my husband," murmured Mrs. Scrase.

CHAPTER V

A DIFFERENCE BETWEEN POETRY AND PROSE

AS the weeks passed, carrying their Sundays with them, Tony remarked a new policy in his Vicar. Quietly, and speaking no hurtful word, Mr. Broadley was arranging that O'Grogan preached as seldom as possible. It was better that the congregation should not be disturbed by his unwise lucidity. Henceforward the morning and evening sermons on Sunday, which were all that mattered seriously, should be reserved to himself, the Vicar, and to staid and tactful old visiting preachers who could be trusted to be ambiguous. O'Grogan could take the Guild services on weekdays and the children's services on Sunday afternoons. His talks to the children could be as direct and new-fangled as he liked, because Alderman Scrase would not be there, nor Colonel Wilberforce, nor Mrs. Hammerton, nor any of those considerable members of the congregation whom it was wiser not to ruffle. Nor, of course, would the Vicar himself be there to hear anything which would make him unhappy. Some of the Sunday School teachers might be upset, but they, as a rule, were of a timid and amenable temper, and, anyhow, quite uninfluential, so they needn't cause one anxiety.

Tony made no comment on this new policy. While still a deacon he could claim no right to go into the pulpit; and the Vicar, in withholding any invitation to him to do so, was but taking the Prayer Book at its word. So he kept silence. But behind this silence indignation was simmering, and there were times when he felt as little like a man of God (who humbleth himself and is not puffed up) as it was possible to feel. If it had not been for a secret hope which was exciting him just now, he might have opened some lively controversies with the Vicar during the staff meetings.

But he was nursing a great hope, and could afford to wait.

In a few weeks' time—on the last Saturday in October—Messrs. Aldo and Wright would publish his first book of poems. And if his great hope came true and the book made its little noise in the world, then Vicar, wardens, and all his critics would have to open their eyes in amazement and sing a smaller song.

Only Honor, to whom for nights past he had been compelled to talk about the poems, and Peggy, who must always have confidences like this, knew of the great event. They knew, too, that he had paid Messrs. Aldo and Wright forty pounds towards the cost of production, but he did not choose to make this public, and he enjoined Honor and Peggy to keep the information to themselves. It didn't mean anything, said he. It was nearly always done when a man published a first book of poems, but the silly people of West Thamesmouth, not knowing this, would say that he had published the book at his own cost, whereas the truth was that, if Messrs. Aldo and Wright had not thought very highly of the poems, they would have asked him to contribute eighty pounds, and perhaps more.

They were not many, these poems; but they were good—he could not doubt it. Nay, he was wildly sure of it. Into them he had distilled, with such stress, such loving labour, all the suffering that had been his, in thirty years. He had begun them fifteen years before when, as a boy, he had sipped for the first time that dreadful cup which henceforth would stand at his side for ever. The first of them was called, "Sybil by the Lake." There were poems that, as a young schoolmaster, he had walked with, in the lanes under Wolstonbury Down, reshaping them, polishing them, caressing them; for those were the days when, Frank Doyle having passed, he had drunk of the cup again. Then there was a poem on the death of a man's love for his bride; he had written it—and yes, he had sobbed as he wrote it—by the lamplight of his cottage at Albourne, in that year before the war, when love dimmed out, and the meaning went from beauty everywhere and all the shrines stood empty. There were war poems—these he believed the noblest of all—shaped one winter in his cellar at Nieuport, because Childe Harold, Jim Stott, Rosy Hughes and so many others had failed to parade on the sea-wall of La Panne. And through all, from the first of them to the last, the same two strains were heard: every man is alone; nothing is stable or endures. Farewell, old Family that used to be: Father, Mother, Keatings, Joyce, Derek. Farewell, old war,

quite faded now; the light is gone from the lantern that threw your phantasms on the screen, and I see now that your pains were nothing more than high lights in that insubstantial show. Farewell, Harold, Aylwin, Kit; good-night, Webster, Stott and Little Willie Sparrow. To what end our pleasant meeting? We do not know; we can but take the mystery as it is, and nerve ourselves for loss, and for our few hours' sentry-go. Pace, pace on quarter-guard; and tell your friends that they may pass, for all is well.

The bitter title of the book was: "Pass, Friends; All's Well."

A volume of poems may be a small thing, and Tony may have been a man with a clearer insight into himself than most; still, the publication of a first book is a draught intoxicating enough for the sanest man, and will mount him on galloping hopes that soon leave reason nowhere. If the book did create its sensation—and it might! it might! Why not? Some of these poems were terrible, and must sear the heart of any man who could understand them and could feel. Were they not just the stuff to kindle resentment here and acclamation there, and so be argued hotly in the smoke of literary dens and over the wine of fashionable boards? . . . Yes. . . . Oh, yes! . . . One thought so.

As the days came and went, narrowing the distance from the October Saturday, till it was only four days, three days, two days away, Tony had nothing but mechanical action to give to parochial tasks, so did the one glowing hope possess him. Not even in his letters to Peggy—still less in his chats with Honor—did he tell one half of the glow that surrounded this hope. He would have been ashamed to. No, not even to Peggy. Odd, this difference between his thoughts of Peggy and his thoughts of his wife. With Honor he always suspected that, dutiful though her enthusiasm would be, she would never really believe that her husband had written something great and would think his hope extravagant; but with Peggy his fear was lest she should await impossible things and be disappointed.

On the eve of the Publication Day as he sat with Honor in the tiny study of white shelves and coloured books, he did not open the all-mastering topic himself, but smoked a great deal and hoped that Honor would shortly do so. She did mention it once, and said how exciting it all was; but then,

Tony having suddenly become too shy to say all that he wanted to say, she began to speak of her sewing meeting—some ghastly sewing meeting that was making fripperies for the Autumn Bazaar. She dealt with it at length. God! A sewing meeting! Well, he said nothing; but dreamed his own dreams. He saw the Vicar coming into the vestry and pouring congratulations over him which he received with becoming humility and deprecation; he saw Alderman Scrase hurrying up to him and saying, "You seem to have done it this time, O'Grogan. Excellent! Excellent!" He saw Mr. Bray taking the Alderman's place and proffering his hand and his humbler congratulations; he saw a stir in the heads of the congregation, as he walked in to his stall on the Sunday after the sensation; and he saw himself, as he went about his week-day tasks, remaining the same humble charming fellow that he had been before this fame invested him.

And that night, as he slept, he kept company with warm visions that did not, it is true, seem to have anything to do with the book, but were alight with happiness, nevertheless. On awaking he remembered why happiness had tinged them. He leapt out of bed and waited for Honor to speak of the great matter. But she had been late in waking, and in the hurry of her dressing remembered nothing. It was a sorrowful poet who went downstairs, and a sullen and self-pitying one who sat down to coffee and bacon. Honor served the bacon and examined her letters; Tony, sighing, retired with his newspaper into a sultry loneliness.

Then the front door shook beneath the knock of a telegraph boy.

"Heavens, what can that be?" cried Honor, starting in her seat. "A telegram at this time!"

"I should have thought you would have known what it was," he sighed, and went out to get the telegram.

It was unreasonable, no doubt, to take the envelope rather savagely from the telegraph boy. Breaking it open on the doorstep, he read:

"Huge good luck tony dear wire any news so excited peggy."

"There's no answer," he informed the boy; and, ashamed of his previous anger, tipped the child, to his astonishment, sixpence. Then, delighted to be holding in his hand so fine

a weapon for the chastisement of his wife, he went back with the telegram into the living-room.

Honor stood waiting for him.

"Oh, Tony!" she said. "Of course! I've only just remembered. I was in such a hurry this morning that I had no time to think of anything. It's the Publication Day! Oh, how could I have forgotten it? Give me a kiss."

"Thank you," said Tony, and accepted the kiss. "Here's Peggy's good wishes."

Honor read the telegram and returned it to him. "Of course she's excited. We all are. Oh, when shall we hear how the book's going?"

"I don't know."

"Tony, how many copies do you think you'll sell?"

"Fifteen, perhaps."

"Don't be ridiculous. What do you really think?"

"They've printed a thousand sheets."

"A thousand!" She seemed surprised, and this offended him again. "We haven't a thousand friends."

He tossed down the telegram.

"When one publishes a book one doesn't rely on one's friends. There are forty million people in England."

"Oh, I'm *sure* we'll sell them all. Give me another kiss. Isn't it all too frightfully exciting? Let's go out and buy one. Will they be in the bookshops?"

"No, my dear, in the cheesemongers'."

"Tony, I believe you think I don't appreciate them properly."

"I know you don't. You try to play your part nobly, but you don't really believe in them, as I do, and as Peggy does. If you did, they'd fill your mind."

She had turned her face away to cry. Going from him to the window, she looked into the street. He could not feel pitiful, but, with a shrug of his shoulders, went out of the room, took a hat, and set off for the Thamesmouth Public Library.

It was hardly to be expected that any of the newspapers would have noticed his book so promptly, but it was just possible that one or two might have done so—Saturday was a good day for the literary journals—and, anyhow, he was quite incapable of staying away from the Public Reading Room in case . . . in case. . . . He spent a morning searching through every likely journal and finding nothing at all—not so much as an advertisement of Messrs. Aldo and Wright's. He declined

to be dismayed and returned to his home, humming as he walked ; and there, on opening the front door, he at least had the satisfaction of seeing a large parcel on a chair.

Honor, her eyes dried and brightly burnished with her resolution to please him, came running down the stairs.

"They're here, they're here!" she cried. "These are the presentation copies. Oh, I've been longing for you to come back and open them."

With her standing impatiently at his side, and now and then rising on her toes, he undid the parcel and picked up the top copy. It seemed a thin little book, in its cardboard covers, and for a moment he wondered how he could have imagined that it was going to set Thamesmouth, much less the Thames, on fire. But for his own protection he had to extinguish this flash of clear sight, and go on hoping. He took the fountain pen from his pocket, and, resting this first copy on his knee, opened it at the title page and wrote :

"For Honor my wife."

She gave her little leap of delight and kissed him.

Sunday followed Saturday, Monday displaced Sunday, and Tuesday, Monday ; smoothly, noiselessly, the days came behind one another and piled up a week, a fortnight, three weeks ; and still the book, wherever it might be wandering, made no sound. There was no murmur in the world anywhere ; Thamesmouth was unexcited. Tony's mind, still tethered to his hope, circled round and round it like a donkey in a field, every day and all day ; and in his more cynical moments he could laugh to think that an idea which meant so much to him could mean nothing to anyone else. When a month had passed, there appeared an inch or two of comment on the back page of *The Times Literary Supplement*, and the next Sunday the book was noticed, together with six others, in half a column of the *Sunday Times*. The first review said that the verses were "competent," than which few sourer plums can be offered to an author ; and the second said that they were "above the average of such work," which is a little sweeter, but not much. Messrs. Aldo and Wright reported that they had sold thirty-five copies in this first month ; and Tony wondered who on earth these thirty-five purchasers could be. Slowly he tore

their letter across, crumpled up the pieces, and tossed them along a high trajectory into the waste-paper basket. He had accepted his sentence.

But, having abandoned the larger hope, he still clung to the smaller one; he still hoped that Thamesmouth would hear of his book and lift its eyebrows in surprise and admiration. Somehow Mr. Broadley, the Scrases, and all the rest must be told of it, and not by the author. So, though he disliked raking for publicity (or, rather, disliked to appear to be doing so), he sent a copy, pleasantly inscribed, to the editor of *The Thamesmouth Advertiser*, and was mightily affronted when issue after issue of that filthy rag appeared with never an allusion to the book. "Dull fools! But of course they can't imagine that it's of much importance. Isn't it the work of a local curate whom they've seen cycling up the High Street in mended shoes? Don't they know that I live in a tiny maisonnette in St. Wilfrid's Road? . . . 'Bless you, it must be an amateurish effort because he lives near us.' . . . Probably the *Stratford-on-Avon Advertiser* thought much the same of young William's verse."

In due course, however, the editor did give to the Rev. Mr. O'Grogan a column of what he thought to be very kindly encouragement and Tony thought to be damned patronizing and pretentious comment. There could be no disputing, said the editor, that Mr. O'Grogan had a most pleasing talent; and as this offended Mr. O'Grogan intensely, he was not pleased when Honor, anxious to do all that was required of her, broke into the room with the paper in her hand and cried: "There's a splendid notice in the *Advertiser*, Tony!" Nor could he do anything but counterfeit pleasure when friends stopped him in the street to exclaim, "I see you've blossomed into something of an author, O'Grogan. There's a quite flattering review in the *Advertiser* of something you've written. Quite flattering, it is."

The Thamesmouth Advertiser appeared on Friday evenings and was studiously read by the citizens of Thamesmouth on Saturdays, so throughout Mattins on Sunday the assistant curate of St. Wilfrid's, while he sang the office and read the lessons, was really thinking of the moment in the vestry when the churchwardens, coming in to count the collection, would make their comments and offer their congratulations, and the Vicar would join in the chorus. He fidgeted for the service to end, and Mr. Broadley teased his patience by preaching a sermon

in the anointed manner, which implies that he expressed it in twice too many words, and those words twice too lovely and too long. Good: it was over; the last hymn was being sung; the Blessing was being given; and now the clergy were in the vestry doffing their surplices.

The Vicar said nothing to Tony. He was probably repeating to himself with no small happiness, the loftier waves of his fine rolling sermon. Alderman Scrase came in, and went straight up to the Vicar.

"Thank you, Vicar. A most dignified sermon."

Inwardly Tony smiled. Mr. Scrase had used this phrase more than once in his hearing; and always Tony suspected that it was meant as a rebuke to him for some of his livelier efforts.

"Thank you," said Mr. Broadley. "Thank you, Scrase."

The churchwardens began to sweep up the coppers on the vestry table into piles of twelve, and the shillings and sixpences into piles of ten. From this almost automatic exercise Mr. Scrase looked up and saw the curate drawing on his coat.

"I see you've been blossoming into rhyme, O'Grogan," he said, and laughed, as if he had said something funny.

"Oh, you mean that little book," answered Tony carelessly. One would have supposed that no subject was further from his mind.

"Yes. I read a most flattering account of it in the *Advertiser*. Quite flattering." Undoubtedly he was surprised that the *Advertiser* should speak so highly of a friend's work. "You must have been pleased with that review, weren't you? I showed it to my wife. We had no idea you'd been blossoming into rhyme."

"It doesn't rhyme," said Tony. "Or very little of it."

"But it's poetry, isn't it?" asked Mr. Scrase. "I understood from the *Advertiser* that it was all poetry."

"I hope it's poetry," grinned Tony. "It's meant to be. But I eschewed rhyme as rather too sweet for the subject matter."

"Oh . . . well . . ." Mr. Scrase left this point, not being quite clear about it. "I should like to see the book."

"Yes, O'Grogan." The Vicar was speaking now: he had come out of his happy thoughts about the sermon. "Yes, I read that review too. We must all read it, mustn't we, Scrase? Can we get hold of a copy, somehow, O'Grogan?"

"Yes. Oh, yes," said Tony.

"But how?"

"At the bookshops. It's published in the usual way." He had no sooner said this than he feared that it sounded rude, so he added hastily: "But don't trouble to buy it, Vicar. I shall like to give you a copy. . . . And to you too, sir, if I may."

"No, I'm going to buy my copy," answered the Alderman, merrily. Truly there was an excellent joke in the vestry. "Yes, and if I like it, I shall buy several copies. Don't you think so, Bray? Don't you think that we ought to do all we can to encourage these young poets? . . . Is it dear, O'Grogan?"

"Five shillings."

Mr. Scrase formed his lips as if to whistle his surprise. "Is it? Really? Five shillings!" Fancy one's curate printing a book and asking five shillings a copy for it! Why, that was as much as a real poet asked! "Still, I'm sure it's worth it. Yes, I'll certainly buy a copy." He had dropped very quickly from "several copies" to one.

"No," persisted Tony. "I'm going to give you a copy. You can buy another, if you like, but I'm going to give you the first. I think I've got one or two copies here." He unclasped his attaché case. "There you are, sir. And may I give one to you too, Vicar?"

Alderman Scrase took the slender little book, and looked at its neat buff cover, its good rough paper, and its large modish print.

"H'm. They've done it very nicely for you, haven't they?" he said. Surprising that the publishers should have treated it so respectfully! "They've made quite a nice little book of it. You must be gratified. Thank you very much." The book went into his breast pocket. "I shall certainly read it when I have time."

"And you, too, Mr. Bray?" inquired Tony of the other warden. "May I give you one?"

"Thank you, sir." Mr. Bray brushed together his hands made dusty by the table, pushed back his cuffs, and took the book. "Yes, I saw something about it in the paper. 'Pass, Friends; All's Well.' A good title. Where did you get that from?"

"Out of my head."

Mr. Bray was surprised.

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"Well, it's a good title, anyhow. Catchy. And can you get five shillings for a book like this?"

"That's about the usual price."

"Lord! Then I think I'll leave the grocery and go in for writin'. Eh, what do you say, Mr. Scrase? Thank you, sir." Mr. Bray's copy went into his side pocket. "That'll be a nice little bit of readin' for this afternoon—just before my—you know what." He winked. "Any lullabies in it? If so, it'll suit me down to the ground."

The Vicar, meanwhile, was glancing through his copy, and keeping his thoughts to himself. Tony knew what they were. Mr. Broadley was wondering whether he ought to be wholly pleased at a junior colleague producing books without a word to him about it, and selling them in the town for five shillings.

Mr. Broadley did not guess that O'Grogan, when he appeared next morning for the staff meeting was thinking only, "What will he say about the poems?" Mr. Broadley, in fact, had forgotten the poems. He said, "Shall we just——?" and they both stood for a collect, after which they discussed the arrangements for the next few weeks, till, at twelve o'clock, Mr. Broadley said, "Well, I think that's all, O'Grogan, for to-day." And Mr. O'Grogan went out into the street.

Alderman Scrase, on the other hand, did bring into the vestry next Sunday an intention of speaking to O'Grogan about his book, but a discussion with the Vicar and Mr. Bray as to the best date for a meeting of the Church Council drove it from his mind; and it was only as O'Grogan, who had remained very quiet all the time, was walking out of the vestry, that he called, "Ah, I read those poems of yours, O'Grogan. Yes, very nice." And this reminded Mr. Bray that he had been given a copy of the curate's little book, and ought to offer some felicitous comment on it now. But unfortunately he had not read it; he had tried to, but he never could abide "poytry," and after wrestling with the first five pages, he had retired from such a bruising contest. He judged it safe, however, to tread in the steps of the Alderman, so he too called out, "Yes, very nice, Mr. O'Grogan," and prayed that Mr. O'Grogan would not stay to examine his knowledge in detail.

Mr. O'Grogan did not ; he went out into the street.

He went out into the street, like Hamelin's piper, smiling to himself a little smile. "Very nice!" Those poems with their sorrow, their satire, and their beaten love! That moment he saw a difference between poetry and prose. If he had written the same matter in a good stinging prose, the Alderman would have fired with indignation and probably would have risen up and burnt the book in his stable-yard as a calumny upon God, Mankind, the War and other sacred things. Mr. Bray would have sat down astonished. But because the matter was dressed in verse and moved to music, it had seemed as unreal to both of them as a man dancing in a fancy costume ; it tripped its measure in a room far away from actual life and was quite pretty to watch, quite nice. A little music, and the sharp blade of a writer was turned into a cardboard sword. Yes, it was always the same : had not those good simple men of the Royal West Essex risen in their hundreds to roar, "Jesu, lover of my soul, Let me to Thy bosom fly," and felt no shame, just because it was sung to music and rhymed ?

"Very nice!" Damn their unintelligent patronage! These people prohibited his preaching as dangerous, but they patronized his poetry as unreal and innocuous. All right!

All right! Suddenly a resolve sprang to life: he would write a book in prose. He would write a gorgeous piece of satire in unequivocal and lashing prose. Yes, *per Bacco*; suddenly the resolve was hot in his head, and the smile with which he had stepped into the street became more than ever like the Pied Piper's—because he knew some magic slept within his quiet pipe the while. He rushed up the stairs of his house to his study, that he might walk up and down with the new magic. Ideas crowded into his mind, and he laughed excitedly as he greeted them. They came and they came; and the face of each of them was more impish than the last. No lunch to-day. Two hours of a single noontime—two hours' pacing up and down his study carpet—and the whole scheme of the book stood before his mind. Even the title had leapt into view: "Sanders Sent the Wrong Wine." Very different from the sorrowing "Pass, Friends; All's Well."

And it pointed the difference between the two books. This book should be a frolicsome blaze, and its sparks as they dropped in showers on their victims would sting. A supper, a symposium like Plato's, but round the table of an

Alderman—no, not an Alderman; an Opulent Layman—with the wine circulating among the guests who represented every type that was to be found in your popular churches—and the Devil in a whimsical moment had substituted a bottle of his own for one of the dozen that Sanders the Merchant had sent; and this devil's wine looked like Oporto's best, and tasted like Oporto's best—but it had the diabolical property—though only for such time as its glow lasted—of lighting genius in the head of everyone who sipped it so that he saw the reality of himself, all delusion stripped away, and was compelled, in the urgency of his genius, to stand up and prophesy about the things he saw. He had the tongue as well as the eye of genius; and he denounced in coruscating terms the lie that he was and that all his hearers were; and then, the glow departing, he sat down, with no more vision in him, and was ready to be scandalized by the prophesyings of the next man whose glass the butler filled.

It was a joyous situation, and Tony was aware of a kind of gurgling effervescence as pungency after pungency phrased itself in his head. But the book would have to be anonymous, because, alas! when an author is diligent to achieve truth his brain is apt to play around scenes and people that he has known, and Tony's supper table, in the beginning, was remarkably like the table of Alderman Scrase, and the people seated around it were closely related to dignified parsons who had preached in St. Wilfrid's pulpit, and to prominent laymen who had listened in its pews. A priest not unlike Mr. Broadley was there; and he sipped the wine and stood up and revealed all the distressing things that he saw in himself and in his hearers. "I see, my good friends, that the life you lead is neither worldliness nor other-worldliness, but a murky mixture of the two; and I do not deny that some of the guilt of it lies at my door, because in my sloth I have abdicated from the dignity of thought, and in my fear I have shrunk from the responsibility of speech." Borough Councillors were there, and churchwardens, and they too drank of the wine and proclaimed their sins to the scandal of the company. Their wives were there, and as soon as the dark old vintage warmed them, they were a greater scandal than their husbands because the confessions which they offered and the accusations which they laid came with so violent an incongruity from the lips of conventional and prudish dames. And as for Miss Pocock, she was the most surprising of all.

‘I am not wholly bad,’ she said. “I see that I am less distasteful than our dear Vicar because I have never had an intelligence like his to wrap up in a napkin and muffle from use lest it vexed my comfort, but I am appalled to see, as I do now, that my motives for undertaking some of my tasks have not had that singleness which I should desire. I do not hesitate to say that in my work for your Diocesan Purity Association some little prurience has mingled with my piety and made the work a pleasure. The opportunity for such weakness as that Society seeks to heal has never come my way, nor will it now, I greatly fear; but I have been interested in it, good friends; the nymph has been as furtive in me as the satyr in you, Vicar, and in you, Councillors, and I see now that in my heart-to-heart talks with my frailer sisters, when I have questioned them and counselled them, I have often sinned by proxy and found it pleasant.”

During the next months the hours that he gave to the composition of this book were some of the most exultant he had known. Doubt broke through at times and whispered of dismay should the work be published—and published it would be; of that he was sure—but the drive in his imagination was too rapid and resistless to give heed to warnings, and he wrote on, with the excitement inflating his throat. Thick and fast came the ideas: the supper table extended itself far beyond the dimensions of Alderman Scrase’s board (and thank God for that!), the room changed its character and took on the spaciousness of a banquet hall; the Devil augmented his mischief from one bottle to twenty; the guests multiplied; tradesmen sat at meat who had accepted the office of sidesmen for the improvement of business; choirmen who sang to the glory of their own voices; a saint or two that the picture might have fairness and beauty; a curate or two who had all the vanities (let it be understood) that the writer could see in himself; an undertaker or two; and, to crown all, a famous bishop, sitting on the right of the host, who loved his high place in public gatherings, and a famous statesman sitting on the left, who made a great to-do of his churchmanship in the councils of the nation. At one stage the butler, wondering if anything was wrong with the wine, went out and sipped it in the passage, and straightway came in and, laying his hand on the sidedoors, published his frailties, and his precise estimate of the ladies and gentlemen he was serving. At another the host sent a

drink, with his compliments, to the musicians in the gallery; and the conductor leant over his balustrade and addressed an astounded assembly.

Impossible to tell here of the labour that Tony gave to this book. His energy was astonishing; and he knew that it was because a repressed intellectual restiveness was escaping in a jet of satire and pasquinade. And, ever disposed to self-criticism, he began to suspect, as he worked, two things of himself: first that for too much of his life he had walked with dreams, and only when he awoke and laughed at the world like this, did he see it as it was; secondly that, whensoever he was writing at high pressure, he had a strange feeling of being loyal to his real self, whereas, when he laid down his pen and went about his clerical occupations, he seemed to don not a little of the unreality that his book lampooned.

He was about half-way through the book when the year of his diaconate expired, and they made him a priest. He tried to pray throughout the service, but two of the young deacons who were ordained with him, and the clergyman who delivered the Ordination Sermon, provided him with some splendid ideas for "Sanders Sent the Wrong Wine."

CHAPTER VI

THE FIRST STRIKE

THAT year a strike came to Thamesmouth. One morning the people of Thamesmouth awoke to see a change in the face of their town, because the strike was there. A wire from Unity House, London—for it was a quarrel in the railways—and the strike sat in every town in England, like an invisible commander who had captured the place overnight, and now occupied it, sudden as frost. Tony, observing a difference in the very sounds on the pavement and sniffing an excitement in the air, hurried out of his house into the streets.

Idle railwaymen were everywhere. Little knots of them in their caps and mufflers stood at the corners, either talking languidly or debating warmly; others strolled in twos and threes past the shop-fronts, with their hands in their pockets and the cigarettes drooping from their lips. A number had congregated outside the Labour Club, leaning in listless indifference against its wall, or standing about the kerb in argumentative groups. Placards of the *Daily Herald* hung in the club windows to cheer the men; and telegrams from London, pasted on its notice board, wished them good luck and reported the response of other areas to the strike call.

On the roads themselves vehicles of every description streamed in one direction taking the business men to London: private cars, charabancs, motor-cycle combinations, and even lorries. One man in a top hat and black frock-coat rode on his old pedal-bicycle past the crowd outside the club, and drew from them a good-humoured cheer. He was a humorist too, and waved his hand in acknowledgment. In this pleasant exchange West Thamesmouth greeted East Thamesmouth; and it showed that, if the strike had split the town into its two parts so that each stared angrily at the other, there

was laughter abroad as well, and it was to be found on both sides. Most of the men were orderly, though here and there a firebrand gesticulated to a handful of lazy listeners. The policemen, though no more numerous than yesterday and no more active, seemed more significant: the strike was in the town and had invested them with glamour. One turned to look at them as they stood in the heart of the crossways controlling the traffic; or one felt their presence at the corners where they stood and gazed in front of them, untroubled. A mounted constable who trotted towards the station was a thrilling spectacle; and the crowd before the Labour Club gave him a fine hurrah. Tony strolled towards the station; and its silence hit him with its strangeness: not an engine chuffed or whistled; not a train rumbled; the distances of the line were as empty of sound as its foreground. At the gates a group of men stood about whom one imagined to be pickets, but the wide approach behind them was as deserted as a school playground in holiday time.

The old exultation jumped in Tony; it jumped always at the sight of war.

Returning along the High Street he met Mr. Broadley. Mr. Broadley was hurrying along with a frown, enjoying the strike too, but in a different way. He had determined, Tony saw, to regard the situation as much worse than it was and to sup well of its rich alarm. Very conscious just now of being the Spiritual Father of Thamesmouth, he was wondering how the Church could play its part in the life of Our Town at this time.

"A bad business, O'Grogan," he said, shaking his head gloomily. "A very bad business indeed."

"Oh, I don't know, Vicar," demurred Tony. "It'll blow over, I expect."

"I don't think so; I don't think so. I don't like the look of things at all, I must say."

"They seem peaceful enough."

"They may seem so, but the men are in a dangerous mood, a very dangerous mood indeed. I feel that we, as a church ought to do something about it."

"Yes, but what?"

"Well—anyhow, we ought not to remain silent at this time. Couldn't we—couldn't we talk to these men?"

"What about?"

"About the—er—the Mind of the Church at a time like this."

"But what is the Church's mind on the subject? Has it got one?"

"Certainly. . . . Of course. . . . And a National Crisis like this is a Call to us to speak out. There's to be a meeting of the men on the Recreation Ground this morning, and I am thinking of going and addressing the men myself."

"But what would you say?"

"Oh, I don't know yet. I can't say off-hand. But I should recommend conciliation of course——"

"It wouldn't do any good, Vicar. Rightly or wrongly, the men regard the Church as the church of the employing class and of the bourgeoisie And so, on the whole, it is."

"That's nonsense, O'Grogan. I mean—that's—that's nonsense."

"Perhaps; but that's what they think now, and that means they won't listen to us."

"Well, we can but try. I don't feel we should remain silent at a time of National Emergency. I am just going to see the Mayor and to offer any assistance that I can give. So I must hurry off. Good-bye." His tone suggested that if he was to save the state, he mustn't stay talking in the High Street. And in a second he was hastening through the people, his round buttocks and thick thighs tautening his suit of pepper-and-salt, which elsewhere swung loose.

Fifty yards farther down the pavement Tony met Mr. and Mrs. Scrase strolling along with the quiet step of the old.

"This is terrible, isn't it, Mr. O'Grogan?" said Mrs. Scrase in her gentle voice. "Very terrible."

"Oh, no," laughed Tony. "Only an unfortunate quarrel."

"It's Revolution," announced the Alderman. "Nothing less. When a single body of men tries to paralyse the community, that, in my judgment, is Revolution."

"But it can't be revolution, sir," Tony objected, softening his denial with a smile, "because it's legal."

"Legal?" exclaimed Mrs. Scrase, to whom this seemed to be a new and unfamiliar view. "Legal? These dreadful men?"

"Yes, Mrs. Scrase. Perfectly legal."

"Of course it's legal," announced the Alderman, "and the sooner we alter the law the better!"

"Certainly," agreed Mrs. Scrase softly.

"Well . . ." Tony evaded the argument, and as soon as possible escaped.

"These dreadful men." The sighing of these words by a quiet and loving old lady, who a year ago was insisting that the same men were "an army of gentlemen," had been almost enough to hurl him on to the side of the strikers. The wounding words did have the effect of driving him home, where he changed his clerical collar and black stock for a soft collar and brown tie. He was already in a brown suit, for it was often his custom on week days to walk the streets in grey or brown mufti (a custom, though he did not know this, that had perplexed many of his congregation). He came out of his house a layman in brown, and set off for East Thamesmouth, where he was going to learn, if he could, a little more of its people. One man at least from the western hill should make an effort to understand them.

Five minutes later he was knocking with the head of his stick on the half-open door of the Wylies' home.

"Yuss. Jest a minute . . ." called the voice of Tib; "jest a minute;" and she came down her narrow passage, wiping her hands on her apron, and peering at the visitor out of short-sighted eyes.

"Good morning, Mrs. Wylie. Is Joe in?"

"Oh, it's you, Mr. O'Grogan. I better not shake hands, I'm that greasy. . . . No, Joe's aht."

"At work?"

"At work? Gaw, that's comic. Yessir, he's workin' hard, I believe yer!"

Tony's eyes twinkled. "Well, what's he really doing?"

She put her fingers into the flaxen hair and lifted it from her brow. "He's gone aht to see the fun."

"What fun?"

"This 'ere strike. No sooner had he heard that it was on than he was aht of the house like an arrer. Jest claps his hat on, says 'Good mornin', Tib,' and was gawn."

"So was I."

"Was you, sir? Joo think it's going to be exciting then?"

"I don't know. There are a lot of people in the streets."

"Are there?"

"Yes, and the strikers are going to march to the Recreation Ground."

"*Are* they? Oh, I say! and there's all me dinner to cook!"

Already she had begun to tidy her hair for the streets.

"Joe took his cornet, I suppose?"

"Law, yes, sir. He's got his cornet with 'im. But he's not makin' any money aht of it to-day, he says. If he plays it at all, he says, it'll be to keep up the sperrits of the boys."

"He's all for the strike, of course?"

"Yuss. He thinks he is. But what's it to do with him, sir? He knows nothing about railways. Let 'em strike by all means, *I* say, if they can get any good out of it, but what's his call to be mixing hisself up with their quarrels? I says, 'You'd be a sight better lookin' round to see if there's a job of money-makin' work for you, in a crisis like this'; but he says he's never going to be a bloody blackleg—that's just his way of puttin' it, sir. He says he's never going back on his class. Lot o' gammon! But that's Joe all over. A bit of a rah, and he's aht enjoyin' it. And one of these days he'll enjoy himself into the arms of a copper—I ain't got no doubt of it. There'll be a set-to with the police and he'll be hittin' the first copper—if you take my meaning. He says he's got a fancy to do that once in his life. What I says is, 'You can give your sympathy and your moral support and all the like of that to your railway boys, but there's no need to go gettin' on the wrong side of the police for them, because that's silly.' But he says he'd be prahd to, if it'd 'elp on the Cause. What I should like, sir, would be for you to go and talk sensible to him. What I mean to say is, he thinks all the world of you."

"I wanted some time——" began Tony.

"And he's a sensible feller—in his *way*," explained Tib.

"I wanted to talk to him some time, Mrs. Wylie. Where is he now?"

"If you arst me, he's at the 'Runnin' 'Orses.' Or he will be as soon as it's open. But of course I forgot; you couldn't go there."

"Why?"

"Not—being a minister—you couldn't. Not into a public."

"Couldn't I?" Tony laughed. "I'll go there immediately."

Tib looked at him, shocked. "No, sir. I don't think you must go there. . . . I didn't mean *that*."

"I'm going now."

"Well, o' course, you don't look like a minister this mornin', if you take my meaning. Though I wouldn't say as I shouldn't guess, meself. Chrimes! Isn't that the band? 'Ark! . . . Oh, I *say*, and I've all me work to do! That'll be the strikers marchin' to the Rec., and Joe'll be walkin' along of 'em, you bet."

"Well," said Tony. "I'll be off. I'm afraid I'm like Joe. I want to see the fun."

"Yes, it do get you, somehow," Tib admitted. "I wouldn't say as I shouldn't like to be goin' along with you. But there's all me dinner to cook. Good mornin', sir."

Lifting his hat, Tony set off. "These dreadful men." And yet they were England, because they were ninety parts of her. The Scrases, in their dullness, thought that themselves and their class were England when they were less than a tenth of her. And it was England that once he had wanted to serve. He had seen laughter and kindness in her, and toleration and fair dealing. Had he been deluded? Here were her workmen arraying themselves against her gentlemen, and the gentlemen hissing back with bitterness. No, a little heat, a little smoke of hatred to roll away, and the old virtue would be found beneath, solid and undestroyed.

Perhaps it was natural that one should not see her so clearly now in these years when disruption was everywhere, as one had seen her in the years when she was forced to integrate and become her real self, because an enemy stood without. No—he frowned as he walked on, trying to order his thoughts—one could see little but disintegration to-day. Look at Thamesmouth, a side-pocket of England. Even here one could feel on the cheek the wind of resentment and revolt. Joe Wylie, that idle and hearty soul, was feeling it—"in his way." Unaware that he was a symbol of anything, he was out with his cornet, trumpeting political change. And Tony himself, was he not a-simmer with restiveness against—something? And the Scrases were heating up to defend—something. The Scrases were the old world; himself was the new; Joe Wylie was a piece of flotsam drifting about on the waves of change; and Mr. Broadley—Mr. Broadley was the Church as it looked on, confused.

These jumbled speculations brought him to the doors of the "Running Horses," a shabby little tavern at the corner of two streets. His hand was on the single door marked "Saloon

Bar," when he changed his mind and, leaving it, passed instead through the double doors marked "Public Bar."

He found four men within. The landlord stood behind his taps, not fat and florid, as one had a right to expect, but long and lean as a hermit of the Thebaid, though hearty and pleasant withal; a young man in a cap and mackintosh sat on a stool against the counter and fingered a glass of stout; opposite him stood a plump man of a merry temper, to judge from the laughter in his face, the tilt of his felt hat, and the way he pushed his hands into his pockets to rattle his money and throw back the skirts of his overcoat; at a table alone, with a glass of flat ale before him, sat a heavy-bodied man, whose bowler hat, pushed back on his hair, exposed a large face, its eyes dull, its mouth slightly open, and its expression as flat as the ale. A wag, looking at this last man, would at once have made whisper of adenoids.

Tony ordered a half-pint of bitter, and took the glass to a bench against the far wall, where he could sit and listen to the talk. He soon had the names of the four talkers. The landlord was Mr. Harrap; the plump and merry man with his hands in his pockets was Will—Will Warner; the young fellow on the stool was Ern; and the heavy man at the table with the flat ale and the flat mien was Alfred.

"They'll be closing the pubs, I shouldn't wonder," the landlord was saying.

"Punk!" scoffed Will Warner, the merry man. "Don't talk so stupid."

"What's that?" inquired Alfred from his table.

"I was saying," explained the landlord, "that if this strike goes on, I shouldn't be surprised but what they close down all the pubs. Nor I should, neither."

"Gawd's love!" said Alfred.

"But they won't, Alfred," Will promised, turning his face towards the table; and he rang a happy tinkle with the moneys in his pocket. "Don't you worry."

"Nah!" Alfred had meditated for some time before he announced this conclusion. "Nah, they won't do that." And he took a sip from his glass, laid it down on his table, and sank back into his thoughts.

"Well, in case they do," said the young fellow on the stool, "I'll have another half." And, having pushed his glass towards the landlord, he sneezed raspingly and blew his nose.

"Got a cold, Ern?" asked Will.

"Gawd, yes," said Ern, wiping his eyes.

"Guess you've been sleeping near a crack," Will suggested; and both the landlord and Ern seemed to detect something funny in this; for they laughed. Alfred, apparently, had sunk too far into his thoughts to have heard it.

"The Government'll take over the railways; that's what I think," offered the landlord; "and they'll run them with soldiers, same as that there Bry-and did in France. I shouldn't be surprised if they did something like that."

"Stuff!" said Ern.

"No, you're wrong there," Will corrected the landlord. "What ole Bry-and done was to call up the strikers as conscripts and then order them to get on with it. Our soldiers aren't railway men, and they wouldn't know the front of a railway train from its arse."

Alfred heard this in his depths and nodded. "Yepp. That's true."

"Don't I wish the Government *would* take over the railways," continued Will. "That'd learn the blighters to rob a poor, struggling commercial like me. Jest put their 'ands in me pockets, they 'ave, and robbed me of pounds." He faced Ern, and rattled what was left in his pockets. "Yes, pounds, me lad; you and your pals; and I hope your rabbits die."

"How's that?" inquired Ern, sitting on his stool and holding his handkerchief in a ball ready to brush his eyes or catch the next sneeze. "First I've heard of you as a commercial."

"Yes, how's that, Will?" asked the landlord.

"How? Why, I've been doing a bit of travelling lately for the guv'nor, and I ought to be at Wolverhampton now, putting over a nice little bit of business, with a tidy commission, instead of wasting my time talking to a lot of duds like you. And now some cove's there with his car, I'll be bound, taking the bread out of me mouth. That's what the strike's done to me. Give me a tanner packet of fags."

The landlord slapped a packet of Player's on to the counter, swept Will's sixpence into a drawer, and absent-mindedly wiped the counter, as if he had served a frothing ale. Will, talking all the while, drew out a cigarette, sucked one end of it to make a mouthpiece, put the cigarette in his mouth and

lit it. "Let 'em fight their directors, I say, and good luck to 'em—so long as I don't have to pay for their fun."

Alfred nodded to his table-top. "Yepp. That's about it."

"What this country wants is not so much striking, but to get a move on with a little work. What we want is a Business Government, as Bottomley always said; and, if I had my way, Bottomley should be the boss of it."

Alfred's head went sideways in corroboration. "Yepp. That Bottomley had a head-piece on him."

"Stuff!" said Ern.

"Who's this Jim Thomas?" demanded Will. "If he had to run the nation instead of a ruddy Railwaymen's Union, he'd learn some sense."

"Ah, but"—this proposition was not so clear to Alfred, and the shake of his head expressed doubt rather than corroboration—"that Jim Thomas has a head-piece on him too."

"Jim Thomas is a——"

But at that moment the door was pushed open, and Tony leaned forward to see if this was Joe. It was not: it was Tib Wylie, with a weather-worn black coat drawn over her apron and a man's cap pinned on to her golden hair.

"Is Mr. Wylie here?" she asked, still holding the door.

"No," Ern answered her from his stool, "but I saw him half an hour ago, outside the 'Shakespeare Head.'"

"What was he doing there?" Mrs. Wylie let the door swing and approached the counter.

"He was playing 'Land of Hope and Glory.'"

"Oh, dear!" sighed Tib; and she explained with sad apology, "he's aht o' work, you see."

"Yes, and then he played 'Smile awhile you wish me sad adieu.'" Ern yielded to a fit of coughing, and spat its outcome into the spittoon at his feet. "Then a hymn."

"Well," sighed Tib, "I dunno. I don't like it. . . ."

"It was 'Rock of Ages,'" said Ern.

"It always seems a come-dahn for a man like 'im," continued Tib, her head shaking. "Picking up your money in the streets like that."

"Oh, but he's not playing for money to-day, he says. He's doing it to keep up the *morale* of the nation."

"I know."

"All the same he seems to have collected a copper or two. He give me a wink and rattled them in his pocket—jest like

Will's been doing here for the last half hour, though God knows why."

"Wellan-why^{not}?" demanded Will, instantly rattling them again. "I ain't got much else to do, with your ruddy strike, 'ave I?"

"Per'aps it's as well if he's making some money," said Tib, "because I shell eften buy him his dinner from the shop to-day." She sat herself on the second stool, and, in abandoning her standing position, seemed to abandon sadness and become her rich explanatory self. "I jest couldn't stop indoors with all the people in the streets telling each other the news and talking abaht it, so I nipped on a coat and hurried out. I expected Jow'd be along of 'em somewhere, but he wasn't, so I come here to find 'im. Did a tall gen'l'man turn up to look for 'im?"

The landlord muttered something; and Mrs. Wylie turned her face towards Tony, screwing up her eyes.

"Law, Mr. O'Grogan! I never thought to see you sittin' there. Law! Fency that now!"

"Why not?" laughed Tony, rising in his place, since a woman had greeted him. Embarrassment emptied his head of witty rejoinders, so he asked quickly, "Will you have something with me, now we're here?"

More surprised than ever Tib stammered, "Yuss. . . . Thank you, sir; I down mind if I do. I down mind if I have a half of stout. It does warm you up on a day like this."

"A half of stout," ordered Tony; and when he had seen it delivered, he wandered back to his bench, for he felt that his presence in the men's midst was an extinguisher on their talk. Alfred's dull eyes had followed him to the counter and back to the seat, and were now staring at him. Tony felt exceedingly uncomfortable.

But Alfred's eyes were quickly drawn elsewhere, as were everyone's, by the first notes of a cornet on the pavement outside. The shadowgraph of a man fell on the papered glass of the door. The shadow had a bowler hat on his head, and a cornet at his lips; and from the cornet, as from a sound picture, came the opening phrases of "Land of Hope and Glory." But they came a little splutteringly, as if the shadow were laughing.

"*That's* Jow," exclaimed Tib.

"Bring him in, someone," suggested Ern. "He's trying to be funny."

"Yes, stop him—do," begged Tib. "I never like to see 'im doing that with me own eyes. Not that there's any shame to it, but I don't like it, somehow. Stop him, Mr. Warner. Tell him I'm here."

Will went to the door, drew it open, and, after joining loudly in the line of the song, "God Who made thee mighty *MAKE* thee . . . *MIGH* . . . itier yet!" said, "Come in yer great chump. And shut yer noise."

The tune stopped abruptly. "Don't mind if I do," said Joe. "I never expected to make anything out of fellers like you. Gawd no!" And he came in, wiping his mouth on the back of his hand.

"And here's your missus, Joe," added Will, in an effective climax.

Joe slammed down his cornet on the counter, threw back his overcoat and jacket, thrust his hands into his trouser pockets, and exclaimed:

"Gawd's truth!"

Will lipped his cigarette and stood watching and rattling his money.

"*Well!*" resumed Joe, when he was recovered. "Did you ever! I ask yer! Here am I slavin' to keep a roof over her head, and she 'avin' a glass of staht! And ole England fallin' abaht our ears. It takes the biscuit. It takes every blinkin' biscuit ever made."

"I jest couldn't stop at 'ome, Jow," said Mrs. Wylie, in one of her rich explanations; "not when everyone seemed to be in the streets, and I heard the band going down St. Mary's Road. But don't you worry. I'm going to take you back a bit of Hot Boiled from the shop for your dinner. You always like that, don't you? And *there's* Mr. O'Grogan, who's been lookin' for yer."

Tib's climax was quite as effective as Will's. Joe quickly followed her glance and saw Tony.

"Strike me!" he said. "Strike me pink!"

Tony grinned back at him.

"Law!" continued Joe, "everyone's out to-day! You on strike too, sir?"

"No," laughed Tony, and was tongue-tied again. "You'd better have a drink with me, Wylie."

"Well, thank you very much, sir; don't mind if I do. What's wrong with the usual, Mr. 'Arrap?"

Tony paid for the usual, which was a pint of bitter, and went back to his seat. As he sat down, he heard Joe whisper: "He musta gawn barmy."

"Cheerioh, sir," said Joe, toasting Tony; and as he did so, he saw Alfred at his table. "Christ!" he said. "And there's Alfred."

"Yepp," admitted Alfred.

"Well, gen'l'men"—Joe was now addressing Mr. Harrap, Will Warner and Ern—"what do you think of it?"

"Think of what?" asked Ern.

"This little old strike."

"Think it bloody silly," said Will Warner.

"Oh, *do* yer!" Will had given exactly the answer Joe wanted. "Silly, eh? Let me tell you what *I* think it is. It's the first shot in the Class War. It's the beginning of the ruddy Revolution."

"Don't be so soft," sneered Will. "There'll be a ruddy compromise, as there always is, and they'll be back at work the day after to-morrow."

"Yepp." Alfred nodded corroboration to the emptiness in front of him. "O'*course*."

"Perhaps," Joe agreed. "I'm not saying we shan't be beat this journey, but this ain't the real go. Eh, is it, Ern? Not by a long chalk. We're only beginning. You wait till they call *all* the unions aht; then we shall know where we stand. We shall dictate our own terms then."

"Come awf it, Joe," begged Will. "Come awf your tub. And why 'we,' any old how?"

"Why we?"

"Yes, why we? Are you a railwayman?"

"Why we?"

"Yes, that's what I said. Are you a railwayman? Or a worker of any sort, if it comes to that?"

Alfred, delighted at this thrust, nodded again. "That's one up on him, that is."

"Why we?" repeated Joe loudly. "I'll tell you why we. Because I stand by my class. That's why we. If they're being let dahn, I'm in with them every time. Isn't that so, Ern? When it was England against Germany I stood by me country, and when it's the workers against the Capittalists I'm in with them. *Nab* do you see?"

"Workers!" retorted Will. "And since when have you been a worker? You ain't done a job of work since you were demobbed."

"Yes, I have, then! So there now! I done a good many jobs——"

"Yes, he has—nah and then," agreed Tib, coming to his defence.

"*Course* I have. And let me tell you jobs ain't so easy to get for a Disabled Ex-Service Man."

"Come awf it, with your ex-service man! We're all ex-service men."

"I see! And was *you* disabled, then? Was *you* disabled? If so, it's the first I've heard of it."

"About as much disabled as ever *you* were."

This flicked Joe on the raw. "Ow, is that so!" he asked in fine satire, but with an ugly look in his eyes. "Is that so? And wasn't I wounded on April the seventh, nineteen-eighteen? Wasn't me shoulder smashed for me then? Wasn't I gassed at Ee-prez in November, seventeen; and didn't I get shell-shock at Passchendaele——?" Suddenly he remembered the presence of Tony. "The gas and the shell-shock were nothing to speak of, I'll admit, but this gentleman here knows that I was knocked right aht in April, eighteen. It was along of him that I was struck dahn. Isn't that so, sir?"

"Certainly, Joe."

Alfred stared at Tony. "Gawd!" he muttered.

"Yah, you make me sick!" said Will Warner. "I was wounded——"

"Yes, but there's wounds and wounds," objected Joe. "There's wounds and wounds."

"I fought for me country as well as you, but I don't expect my country to keep me for the rest of my natural. All I want is, when I've got a job, to get on with it, and not be interfered with by a lot of men——"

"What I mean to say is——" began Alfred, who had risen to a half-sitting, half-standing position, as if he desired to address the gathering at the counter.

"—whose quarrels," pursued Will, "don't interest me, and, anyhow, seem damn silly if they do——"

"Don't interest you!" cried Joe. "Then they bloody well ought to. Their interests are ours in the long run, yours and mine——"

"What I mean to say——" began Alfred again, still in his half-cock position, and ready to go off.

"When I ask 'em to look after my interests," shouted Will Warner, "then I'll thank 'em for doing it. But are they thinking tuppence about me? P'raps and p'raps not! Gahn! My wages can go up the spout so long as theirs are all right."

At his table Alfred sat down, as if relieved of the necessity of delivering his speech. "Yepp," he said, "and that's all there is to it. There's no answering that."

Will turned to his glass on the counter. "I've said it before, and I say it again: I don't expect my country to keep me. I've got some pride, I have."

"And ain't I?" demanded Joe, taking a menacing step forward. "Ain't I got me pride too?"

Will drank from his glass, put it back on the counter, and pushed it away from him.

"Not so as you'd notice it," he said.

"Oh, that's what you say, is it?"

"Yes, that's what I said."

"Then I tell you you're a liar."

"Liar?" said Will. "Liar?"

"Yes. And a ——" The word Joe used may not be told.

"Oh? And a ——" Will's lower lip protruded, and he faced Joe.

Meanwhile Ern spat quietly into the spittoon. "Slosh him one on the jaw, Will," he recommended.

"I've more than half a mind to," said Will.

And Alfred rose to his half-cock position again. "Yepp. Don't take that from him, Will."

But here Mrs. Wylie entered the quarrel, thrusting her face towards Ern. "And *you* shut up," she ordered him. "'Tisn't no business of yours. I may not agree with all that Mr. Wylie says, but Mr. Warner ain't got no call to say he hasn't his pride. . . . Nah, it's enough to make any man call names."

"I'll pride him," said Joe, stepping forward.

"Yes, slosh him one on the ear-ole, Joe," advised Ern, with magnificent impartiality.

"Now then!" called the landlord. "Don't start fighting in here."

"He called me a ——" explained Will.

"Well, you can't fight him *here*."

At his table Alfred reverted slowly, very slowly, to the less dangerous sitting position, while Mrs. Wylie drew her husband back. "Yes, you leave him be, Joe," she soothed. "If he calls you names, don't you copy him. It ain't gentlemanly."

"I'm not fighting anyone," Will assured the company. "If he likes to say I'm a liar, he can. Coming from him, it don't worry me. We all know what he is."

"And what do you mean by that?" hissed Joe.

"Now then!" called the landlord warningly.

"Yuss," said Tib. "That was nasty, that was. But you come away, Joe. Mr. Warner must be tight to talk to you the way he does."

"Well, I dunno . . ." said Joe, looking at Will. "I sometimes wish I were dead when I look at fellers like you. Straight I do."

Will shrugged his shoulders to express an utter indifference to anything Mr. and Mrs. Wylie might say of him; and Joe turned to the landlord. "Gimme another half of the usual, Jim," he snapped.

It was while the landlord was drawing the ale, and Joe was feeling in his hip-pocket for some money, that Will suddenly, and almost peevishly, tossed a shilling on to the counter. "Here, 'ave it with me," he grumbled. "That one's on me, Mr. 'Arrap; and give another to his missus, if she'll have it."

Joe stared at him.

"Yes, jest to show there's no ill-feeling—really," Will explained. "Perhaps I did rile you a bit."

"Strike me pink, Tib," said Joe, still staring at Will, "but I believe he's a gent."

"Yuss," Tib agreed. "That was the act of a real gentleman, I'll say it anywhere. It isn't many as'd behave like that. And I reckon you might tell him you're sorry, too, because you *were* rude, yer know. I didn't like to hear it, comin' from you, I must say. There, tell 'im you're sorry."

"Well, then, I am then," said Joe.

"Oh, shut it," begged Will. "Put your nose in the mug."

"That's what I will do—gaw!" said Joe. "And here's to yer. All the very best."

Will drank too. "That's it, mate," said he.

"All I meant," explained Joe, "was like this: what I was trying to say was we don't stand together enough as a class."

Not as a class, we don't. We grumble and grahse, but we never get a move on, unless our pockets are hit, whereas if we all worked together . . . But we're too darned easy-going, I reckon, and the nobs know it and take advantage of it; and I'm not sure that I blame them, neither. We grahse and do nothing about it, blast our bloody eyes."

Whereat Joe drank a heart-felt damnation to himself and his class.

"I dare say you're right," Will allowed.

The air having lightened thus happily, Tony seized the moment for escape. He got up, nodded good-day to all, and walked out.

"Who's *he*?" asked Will of the landlord, when the door had swung behind him.

"God knows," said Mr. Harrap.

"He?" Joe was always delighted to possess exclusive information. "He's Captain O'Grogan; and he commanded my company in the 15th Royal West Essex. I was his batman in Gallipoli, Sinai and France."

"Go on!" exclaimed Will, incredulously.

"And one o' the best, he was. Got a D.S.O. at Ee-prez."

"Go on!"

"And he's a minister now at St. Wilfrid's," added Tib.

"Shut up, Tib," commanded Joe. "I'll lay he didn't want that known."

"He's a *what*?" asked Alfred, from his table.

"Minister at St. Wilfrid's," Ern promptly informed him.

"*Him*?" Alfred nodded towards the place where Tony had sat, "*That* feller?"

"Yes."

"Gawd's love!" said Alfred.

CHAPTER VII

SHOCKS FOR THAMESMOUTH

OF all the sermons that the new curate preached from the pulpit of St. Wilfrid's the most famous was the one delivered, in very quiet tones, on that Sunday when the Railway Strike was in Thamesmouth. Most famous in its little world, because it was longest remembered, best disliked and most often mentioned by his enemies. And yet it was very simple and quiet. All his sermons were simple and quiet. Fretted by the pomposities with which that pulpit usually resounded, and loving with an artist's love simplicity and restraint, he studied always to be natural in manner and colloquial in phrase; he kept his sermons within the modesty of fire-side talk. And for this reason there were those of his congregation who thought him no preacher at all.

It was not a very original sermon; indeed, it was but the statement of a very old truth; but its earnestness was intense. The springs from which it drew were not wholly pure: combativeness, self-assertiveness and obstinacy may all have been there, but in the main it poured from the deepest heart of Tony as surely as the sincerest of the poems in "Pass, Friends; All's Well." Combativeness, because in the last few days he had heard the strikers branded as improvident wasters, public-house loafers, Sabbath desecrators, drunkards and adulterers; self-assertiveness and obstinacy because it was the first important sermon he had been allowed to preach for many weeks and he had every intention of going on where he left off; but a great sincerity and earnestness because, with the best of him, he truly loved the men he was defending and the people he was addressing—and because to-night he was being loyal to vague visions that he could see.

The Vicar was away to-night, addressing the strikers; hence his permission to the curate to preach. Tony preached.

The Vicar addressed the strikers ; Tony addressed the accusers of the strikers.

The best method of defence is attack. He defended the Vicar's audience by indicting his own. His chief contention was provocative enough, but provocative, he hoped, of thought, self-criticism, and a larger kindness. It amounted to saying that, all his life, he had observed how sometimes the technically bad—the swearer, the drinker and the fornicator—could be fundamentally good, while the technically good could be—no, not bad—but missing goodness.

"It is going to be difficult to make clear what I mean : so please be very patient with me and very understanding." He smiled disarmingly. "To be tolerant and understanding is itself a part of goodness."

He went on quite simply. He tried to show that in the future, when the minds of men were clearer and wiser than now, they would see a greater crime than Illegality, and it would be Unreality, because this was a falseness eating at the root of a man's life and turning its flower and its fruit into a lie. Once or twice in his life, he said, he had met men who made him feel—and he could not analyse this feeling, he could only trust it and declare it—that it was better to be real and a sinner, a cheerful breaker of all the laws, than to be unreal and a cheerless slave to their tyranny. Such honest sinners had at least an integrity and a wholeness ; they were their real selves, and when one met them one met the man himself and not his mask. So often, too, it was because of their vitality that they were offenders, whereas sometimes, with us others, it was because of our timidity that we were good. We should do well to ask ourselves often whether it was out of our strength that we were blameless beneath the law, or out of our weakness.

He felt the wave of resentment ripple over the massed people beneath him. Mrs. Scrase rustled ; Alderman Scrase examined his knuckles and a signet ring ; Mr. Bray stared up at the preacher, frowning, but not in hostility so much as bewilderment.

"Ah," said Tony, sensitive as a barometer to the atmosphere in the church, "I know I am but a poor hand at ordering all this into a logical argument, for the simple reason that it is not clear to myself : I only know that I feel it, and that I want to give my feeling to you. Perhaps I shall do it best by

a story. Let me try to dramatize my meaning in the picture of a man whom once I knew and loved."

Then, still leaning on the pulpit's lectern, and speaking in even, unaccented tones, he told them the story of one man. Perhaps that man was not Hughes Anson. Perhaps the Roseate Hughes was but the germ out of which an artist, for his own ends, created a portrait more humane than any for which that jovial offender could have sat. Perhaps it was just Hughes Anson as a lover chose to see him and to hold him in memory. And yet Tony was not sparing him as a sinner: for his own purposes he was heightening the lights and deepening the shadows; and the people listened attentively. Ay, this man was a sinner if ever there was one: he swore and blasphemed with the best, and was not without pride in a language which could light up the battlefield for miles around; too often, when opportunity presented itself, he went off to adventure among women and came back aglow and rosy with his tales; too often, when circumstances were favourable, he sought the merry lands of intoxication and took others with him along the same road—and yet one could not know him without feeling that in his essence he was good.

Again that flutter of impatience through his listeners. But unrepentantly, and very quietly, he pursued his story.

"The last act of this man was a crime. Down in a dug-out in front of Passchendaele, he robbed another unit of all their rum, and gave it in generous but illegal measure to his own men, and then led them out to the battle and died with them."

Tony paused.

"I hardly know why I found him good. Let me try to see why. In the first place, if he was illegal, he was not false; he was himself, and this, because it gave him the ease of integrity, left him energy for much that was good. He overflowed with friendliness towards all he met; he was kind and concealed his kindness; he would go out of his way to serve a friend, and not for praise, because often he kept the service out of his friend's sight and out of the sight of all men; he was always joyous and laughing under the worst conditions and he kept others joyous and laughing too; he respected the different opinions of other men, and he honoured an austere morality, wherever he saw it, as something too high for him; he was brave; he was the best commander I ever knew, and his men loved him.

"And if this man was not good, I know not where goodness lies."

After that sermon Tony had but to divide his critics into their varying blocks. There were the stubborn, who disliked his opinions and therefore disliked him and thought him a fool; and Mr. and Mrs. Scrase must now be accounted of their party. "Such talk is not only a countenancing of immorality, but an incitement to it," said the Alderman; and his lady echoed him, shaking her head sorrowfully and uttering, as her manner was, the hardest words in the gentlest voice. "Terrible, terrible," she said. There were the amicable and unintelligent, who resisted the doctrine no less, but could not bring themselves to dislike the man; and Mr. Bray, at moments, was such a one. "Pity he's such a Socialist," Mr. Bray would say, "because he's a nice fellow at heart." Then there was a third party, and the Vicar might be pronounced its leader, who had sufficient intelligence to know that, if they whipped their brains out of their indolence, they would see a deal of sense in the young man's views; it was not the views which Mr. Broadley disliked, but their utterance aloud.

He took the young man to task about this one evening, as they smoked together in his drawing-room.

"I don't quarrel with your substance, my boy, but with your manner, if I may say so. It's fatal to be provocative—fatal. In my thirty years as a priest, if I've learnt one thing, it's this, to be very tender with the consciences of the weaker brethren. Very tender. Now look at the time you chose: right in the middle of the strike, when feelings ran high. It was dangerous to speak at a moment like that. After the men were beaten, then, I feel, your sermon would have been unexceptionable."

"Possibly," Tony allowed.

"Yes, and our people would have listened then to a talk about generosity and—and all the rest of it. They are good-hearted people. But one must go gently with them, O'Grogan. Yes, I'm sure of it. It's fatal to be provocative."

"D'you know, Vicar, I'm not sure that I agree with you," said Tony, and laughed, that the disagreement might not shock too much. "I sometimes think that it's fatal not to be provocative."

"Oh, that's nonsense—nonsense," protested Mr. Broadley. "Forgive me, but how old are you, O'Grogan?"

"Thirty-four."

"And I'm fifty-seven. I was ordained at twenty-three. That's to say I was being ordained when you were being born."

"Oh?" said Tony. His accent suggested that this was an interesting but irrelevant fact.

"Yes; so don't you think that in this matter I am more likely to be right than you?"

"Not necessarily, Vicar. I can never see that the age of a speaker affects the validity of his argument."

"Oh, but that's nonsense." It was somewhere here that the Vicar retired from intelligent thought.

"But why?" demanded Tony brightly. He was enjoying the argument. "If it's nonsense, then it follows that the Bishop, who is seventy, will always be more likely to be right than you—which, as you will allow, is absurd."

"I always bow to the Bishop's ruling," said Mr. Broadley.

"Yes, but in profound disagreement sometimes."

"Hrmmm . . . well . . ." muttered the Vicar, and bent forward to stir the fire: he had no reply to hand.

Tony could not doubt that Honor, though always loyal to him in word, must be placed among those who disliked much that he preached in church or argued in rooms. She had quite failed to grasp his meaning when he suggested that a man could be at once immoral and good; and she could not see why, even if he thought such things, he should say them in public. She wanted him to be popular in the parish, and he was getting himself disliked; and it was silly. He tried to explain his meaning to her, on the Sunday evening after the sermon, but her brow furrowed in her inability to understand, and her arguments on the other side, so facile, quick and unsubtle, exasperated him not a little. When she said, "You'll make yourself so unpopular, Tony," he retorted warmly, "Oh, dammit, what do I care for that?" and Honor sighed and carried the argument no further. But she went to bed, thinking that men could be very quixotic and perverse.

Once set, these parties were not to be quickly dissolved, and they were still in being, many months later, when an anonymous book offered itself to the world under the curious title, "Sanders Sent the Wrong Wine."

Thamesmouth did not notice its publication. It was

necessary for a book to make a big noise in London, and an increasing one, before its reverberations were felt in Thamesmouth; and this book, it would seem, had failed to strike the London gong. Its author had approached its publication day with all those emotions of excitement, doubt and hope which he had carried towards the publication of his earlier book of poems; but he had also stiffened himself for another blow of disappointment; and when it came, he took it almost callously on the place where he had taken his last. The book seeming likely to "flop," he was glad that it was anonymous: he would be spared the spoken sympathy of his friends, and what was worse, their unspoken distrust of his talent. He could wish that he had not even mentioned it to Honor. He had not done so, right up to the day of publication. But the excitement of that morning, when the six presentation copies arrived, drove him to the unhappy step. At first he had hidden the books away, but it was no good: thirsting for a word of praise, and for companionship in excitement, he ran upstairs, two steps at a time, to the room where Honor was making the beds.

"This seems to be rather a quaint book," he said. "I want you to read it."

"What is it?" she asked, less interested, just now, in literary criticism than in turning the sheet over the blanket and smoothing it down.

"It's got the rummiest title."

"Is it a novel?"

"No. I don't know how you'd describe it." He opened the book and turned over a few of its pages as if he would consider it again, not being completely familiar with it yet. He did not show that he was loving it as his own child. "It's really a series of essays put into the mouths of some imaginary people."

"Oh, I hate essays. Must I read it?"

"No." Nervously he shut the book with a snap. "I ought to have known you wouldn't look at it, unless it was the lightest of fiction. It's unfortunately a book of ideas"—he walked to the window and stared out sadly—"and the ideas happened to tally with my own—that's all."

Honor looked up. "What's the matter, Tony? You're not huffy, are you?"

"Oh, no. No," he answered sarcastically. It was senseless,

the sarcasm, but it eased a pain. "Not at all; not at all. Only rather sad. One has a fancy sometimes for a little understanding of one's silly enthusiasms; but one is a fool."

Honor came forward and put her hand on the book to take it; but childishly he held it tight, and at last drew it from her clasp.

"No. I don't want you to read it just to please me."

"All right," accepted Honor; and, abandoning playfulness, walked to her dressing-table, where she pushed home a drawer rather angrily and patted into place her abundant auburn hair.

With a heart whose every beat was an ache, Tony opened the book once more, looked at its pages, and shut it despairingly. Then, keeping it closed in his hand and, humming a small consolation to himself, he meandered out of the room, while Honor, with a lift of her beautiful shoulders, went back to her beds.

But that night, when they were sitting together in the white study, Honor silently working and he pretending to read but really thinking of his book, she suddenly let the work fall to her lap and commanded with a smile, "Tony, give me that book at once."

"Which book?" he asked, and felt ashamed that he should persist in this childishness.

"The one you were so rude about this morning."

"Oh, *that* thing. . . ."

He clambered to his feet—as if the business were not urgent or of much interest—and took it down from a shelf.

"There you are. But honestly, my dear, you won't like it. It'll shock you."

"Never mind. You're quite right. I mustn't read only the books that I like. I'm doing this for my health."

"Promise me that you'll tell me exactly what you think of it. Don't say anything just to please me."

"I promise." And, tossing her work on to a little table, she curled herself up in the arm-chair and began to read.

Tony tried to lose himself in the book beneath his eyes, but he could not: he was compelled, every few seconds, to come over the top of it and study Honor's face that he might learn her thoughts: surely her lips would be twisted into smiles again and again; surely they would part sometimes in laughter; surely her eyes would be fixed with interest or twinkling with amusement all the time. But more often than not, as he stole

these glances at her, he saw that the movement was in her forehead, not in her lips or eyes : it creased, either in an effort to understand, or in offence ; it smoothed in resignation ; it creased again—and his heart in his breast was like some polyp on a rock that dilates and contracts with pain. Sometimes she turned a page back, to read it a second time ; and fretfully he thought, “What’s the difficulty ? The book is lucidity itself.” Once she laid it down on her lap, and stared at the fire ; and he decided that it was boring her ; but she picked it up again and pushed on with her reading, and this action hurt him most of all.

It was two hours before she finished and laid it on the table beside her.

“Well ?” he inquired.

“I think it’s clever,” she said.

“You’re saying that to please me.”

“No. I suppose it’s clever.”

“Which means that you dislike it intensely ?”

“I think it’s a little unkind.”

“Of course it is ! All satire is unkind. Have you ever read Swift ?”

“No, I don’t think so. Let’s see, ‘Gulliver’s Travels,’ that’s Swift, isn’t it ?”

“Yes ; and compared with Gulliver, that book’s a caress. All wit is unkind. The wretched book *is* witty, isn’t it ?”

“Oh, yes, it’s witty enough, I suppose.”

“Well, I tell you : all wit has a quality of malignance.”

“Oh, I don’t think so.”

“It’s not a question for thought. It’s an accepted fact.”

Honor did not dispute this, because she did not understand it.

“I’m sorry,” proceeded Tony. “I wanted you to like that book.”

“Well, I do—in some ways.”

“No, you don’t. It horrifies you ; and I’m sorry, because—oh, well, because I wanted you to like it.”

“But why ? Why this book more than others ? You don’t usually get upset if I——”

“Why ? Oh, well, because I wrote it myself.”

“*What ?*”

“Yes. It’s been a little secret of mine, and the very devil to keep, my child. I am the anonymous author.”

"Oh, Tony! . . ." She stared incredulously. . . . "Oh, I think you were wise to keep it anonymous."

His legs had been crossed, but now he brought his swinging foot to the ground with a stamp, sat erect for a second—then stood up, and began to walk about the room; and Honor knew that she had said a wrong thing again.

"I only meant," she stuttered, "that it would hurt people like the Vicar, and the Scrases and——"

"In a sense it was meant to hurt them——"

"But, Tony——"

"Oh, 'but Tony' be hanged! That 'but Tony' shows me how little you understand anything that's in my mind—how utterly different we are. It—it—it hurts rather. I honestly believe you'd rather be the wife of the unsuccessful curate that I am than of the successful author that I hope to be."

Honor sighed. "I'm only anxious that you shouldn't make yourself unpopular in Thamesmouth."

"There you go! Thamesmouth looms much larger to you than anything else. You'd rather have the praise of this mossy little spot—just because it's near at hand and looks important—than the praise of a whole enlightened world that's out of sight and therefore doesn't seem very important. Tell me frankly, Honor: supposing this miserable book goes—supposing it is a howling success—which would you rather: that I acknowledged the authorship or kept it secret? Quite frankly now?"

"You *couldn't* acknowledge it," said Honor. "As a clergyman you couldn't. Oh, no, Tony; think of the scandal."

"God!" It was not an exclamation but a sigh. "Well, you needn't worry. I don't suppose it'll go; it's hardly the sort. It'll perish quickly and be forgotten, and then we shall all be happy."

But when he said this he did not believe it. The book was only twelve hours old then, and he believed with an inflating, exalting confidence that its life would be large and noisy and long. The quiet of the first and second week did not destroy this confidence, and the mild murmurs of the next weeks played on it and swelled it; it was the steady silence afterwards that persuaded him at length to have done with hope. He accepted the conviction that the book was dead; and he was surprised to find that, because the conviction had been pressed upon him gradually, it did not bruise very much. A bold venture had failed, and that was all.

But one can never tell what a book is doing, out there in the silence. And it chanced that a Bishop read "Sanders," and, being a young man with a nimble mind and a desire to see things done before he went hence, he spoke of it as "a healthy piece of dynamite" in a sermon in Westminster Abbey. Then a very famous author, whose every word was "news," poked fun at the same Bishop in an after-dinner speech, suggesting that his lordship was himself the anonymous author and had a healthy desire to push his own wares. To substantiate this theory he read from the book the Bishop's speech amid the uproarious laughter of five hundred people who had dined well. The newspapers reported the speech, and the book moved, leaving the tape with a vigorous spurt. At once its publishers resuscitated their faith in it, and sent a specimen copy to every prominent clergyman in the land, hoping earnestly that the moderns among them would praise it in their pulpits, and the ancients would denounce it in the same place. Which happened in the providence of God, though not, of course, as widely as the publishers hoped. The book accelerated its pace. The booksellers began to "feature" it in their windows, and the paragraphists made a stick or two of copy out of the theories as to its anonymous author. One gossip writer referred to this riddle as "the talk of London," and a curate down by the sea walked daily on air. Daily he drew into his lungs great draughts of hope. The wash from the London whirlpool rippled into Thamesmouth. Mr. Broadley read the book, to his distress, though, needless to say, he discerned no portrait of himself among its characters. The Scrases read it, and their indignation flamed, but they did not, any more than the Vicar, fit its caps to their own heads. Happily, they spoke of it everywhere, so that a great number of their neighbours sat with "Sanders" in their drawing-rooms, or in their London trains. My God! Thamesmouth was reading his book! And did not know that its author was cycling about its streets.

One evening the author and his wife sat at supper with the Scrases in their brown dining-room, and the book leapt into the talk. Tony maintained a grinning silence, Honor an unhappy one, directed at her plate, as the Alderman called down the table, "You ought to denounce the book, Vicar. You ought to denounce it from the pulpit. The harm it can do! . . ."

"It's terrible . . . terrible," echoed Mrs. Scrase.

"The latest is that some parson wrote it," said Mr. Broadley.

"Well, if he did," asserted the Alderman, "all I can say is, such disloyalty is unpardonable. Unpardonable. In my young days loyalty was a virtue. Nowadays it seems that every young man is ready to attack his own mother. Have you read it, Mrs. O'Grogan?"

Honor's face, coming up from her plate, was crimson. "Yes."

"And don't you agree with me?"

"I—I thought it was clever and witty," said Honor heroically.

"I found it neither clever nor amusing," assured the Alderman.

"I agree with my wife," broke in Tony, who always had a dare-devil love of treading on dangerous ground. "I found it hugely amusing, whatever else I may have thought of it. As a book I enjoyed it."

"You *enjoyed* it?"

"Yes; and in spite of the fact that quite a lot of it seemed applicable to myself. I rather like being made fun of."

"It depends how it's done; it depends how it's done," proclaimed the Alderman.

"Well, I thought it was done rather well."

"It was done in the worst possible taste."

"Taste," laughed Tony, "is a matter of—taste. All I know is that I should have been quite proud if I had written it myself." He sent a sly glance at Honor across the table, but he saw only the parting in her auburn hair.

"I wonder if they'll discover who wrote it," said the Alderman, rather as if the nation would then be in a position to take criminal proceedings.

"I doubt it," said Tony.

"It couldn't be a clergyman who wrote it," Mrs. Scrase submitted, with a marvellous incomprehension of the argument that had gone before, "because it can only be someone who hates the Church."

"I can't agree with you, Mrs. Scrase," demurred Tony. "Isn't it possible to criticize in love?"

"Yes, yes; but not in public," called the Alderman. "Not to make of your Church a public Aunt Sally."

"Quite." The Vicar endorsed this, feeling that his churchwarden had scored a point.

"Christ attacked his Church publicly enough," suggested Tony.

"He didn't," Mr. Scrase denied; "He attacked the Pharisees."

"And perhaps," said Tony quietly, "that is what this author thinks he is doing."

"*Chut!*" The Alderman rejected this, but could not at once refute it.

"And if it comes to that, sir," said Tony courteously, "I've heard you attack the Anglo-Catholics publicly, and very effectively too. They're the Church."

"They're not, that's my point," said the Alderman, triumphantly. "In my judgment, they're certainly not. They're a travesty of it."

"Perhaps that is what this author thinks of the people he is attacking."

"There are no such people," the Alderman announced with finality. "*I've* never met such people."

Meanwhile the book, in the publishers' phrase, "continued to storm." An American house cabled a wholly satisfying offer for its immediate publication. Tony cabled back accepting the offer. The newspapers promoted the mystery of this best-selling but anonymous author from the paragraphs of "The Man about Town" to the news columns. The publishers bedded out, in every suitable journal, their large display advertisements, and week by week altered their tale from "25,000 copies" to "30,000 copies," "33,000 copies," "35,000 copies." Tony's head, now an adding machine, told him, to the disarrangement of his breath, that his first royalty statement would be accompanied by a cheque for £1,500. Packets of press-cuttings dropped to the door-mat every twenty-four hours, and those which had been thin little fellows two months ago were gross and corpulent now. The American publishers, eager to catch the trade wind from England, brought out the book within two months of concluding the agreement, and, three weeks after, reported that "its success was assured." Envelopes of press-clippings from America joined the packets

of press-cuttings from England. Pat on the day the royalty statement of the English house arrived, and the cheque too; and though the statement showed only 23,000 copies sold and the cheque missed the thousand by fifteen pounds, Tony was uplifted by both, and left the riddle of the 35,000 copies to be expounded later. A stranger knocked at his door, and the maid came in with his card. Tony read "Mr. Harold V. Lennard," and searched his brain to remember where he had seen the name before. An introductory letter from the publishers partnered the card, and in it they said: "You will doubtless be familiar with the plays of Mr. Lennard. He has approached us with a view to collaborating with you in an adaptation of your book to the stage. Having required from him an undertaking that he will not disclose your name, we have thought it best to put him in personal communication with you." "Show him up," said Tony to the maid; and his heart beat high. Mr. H. V. Lennard, on being shown up, declared his enthusiasm for the book and his conviction that if certain situations implicit in the central idea were developed, it could be made into a comedy of ideas with highly amusing moments. "Let's get on with it," said Tony.

Three days later a second stranger sent up his card: "Mr. Charles Arthur Hope, *The Daily Sun*," and there was no introductory letter this time. "Show him up," said Tony. A most remarkable young man entered; not remarkable in appearance, for in appearance he was like any other young man who, in grey flannel trousers and a sports coat, tries to look like a Cantab and does not succeed; but remarkable in speech and manner. His stream of words was more swift and full than any Tony had heard before from a young Englishman in grey flannel trousers; and his manner blent the ingratiating accents of an insurance agent angling for a client, a doctor encouraging a patient, and a tramp on the doorstep touting for the price of a cup of tea. He had come, said he, to interview the Rev. O'Grogan on behalf of *The Daily Sun*.

"What on earth for?" laughed Tony. "What have I done?"

"You know best, Mr. O'Grogan," smiled the young man.

"Is it about our Organ Fund?" asked Tony. "Because, if so, I——"

"No, Mr. O'Grogan, it is not."

"I know! It's about the repairs to the church roof? Please sit down, and we'll discuss them."

No, it was not about that either. Mr. Charles Arthur Hope, without sitting down, expressed his certainty that Mr. O'Grogan must know perfectly well what was a matter of great public interest at this moment.

"Coal," suggested Tony promptly. "All this dissatisfaction in the coal mines. You want my opinion on the fundamental issues——"

"I am afraid I am not in the least interested in your opinion *re* that, Mr. O'Grogan," said this frank young man.

"*Re* what then? I am at a loss to imagine what it can be."

"May I help you, Mr. O'Grogan?"

"If you will be so kind. I am—I am completely non-plussed."

Mr. Hope thereupon put it to him as man to man, while they both stood facing each other. To prove how completely he possessed the ethical truth of this affair, he expounded the imperative demands of altruism, the reasonable claims of self-interest, the kindly promptings of friendship, and the binding injunctions of our English good-sportsmanship. First come, first served. His paper had learned that the Rev. O'Grogan was the author of "Sanders"——

"What rubbish!" interrupted Tony.

"Excuse me, Mr. O'Grogan"—and Mr. Charles Arthur Hope flowed on. These secrets were difficult to keep in Fleet Street, and if Mr. O'Grogan did not allow *The Daily Sun* to publish the news with his authority, some less reputable paper would make a scoop of it at an early date——

"But aren't you out for a scoop now?" asked Tony.

Mr. Hope was quite unabashed. "Frankly, yes, sir, but by reputable means. . . . In fact, Mr. O'Grogan, I am instructed to meet you up to any reasonable amount, if you will allow us the exclusive right to publish this information, and will just give us some little story as to how you came to write 'Sanders.' Anything will do."

"Oh hell, no!" Tony protested; though why he should object to taking this money was not clear to him: it seemed rather sentimental. "But supposing I am not the author?"

The young man smiled pleasantly at a pleasant jest.

"Well, anyhow, do sit down," said Tony.

The young man sat down and produced a notebook and pencil.

"No, you can put those back again," laughed Tony; and Mr. Hope smiled again, shrugged, and compromised to the extent of putting the pencil back in his pocket and retaining the notebook.

Tony paced up and down with his problem. He saw that the book's authorship was bound to be divulged sooner or later, and that if he hugged his anonymity too long, till it was torn from him, he might appear to be ashamed of his creation. And if he did acknowledge it, he did not see why this young man should not have the reward of his prowess.

"All right. Go ahead," he said abruptly. "Only no 'story,' if you please."

"Right, Mr. O'Grogan! As you wish."

Mr. Charles Arthur Hope stood up, plunged the notebook in his breast pocket, and prepared to leave. He was now as anxious to get away as before he was anxious to remain. Leaving a stream of fulsome thanks and assurances behind him, like the spoor of a snail, he ran down the stairs and out into the sunlight.

That afternoon and evening Tony was both excited and apprehensive. To-morrow he would be famous. But to-morrow the fat would be in the fire. To-morrow some time he would have to meet the Vicar. He spent a long hour in his chair, holding the bowl of his pipe with both hands and knocking its stem against his teeth, while he wondered how best to meet the Vicar. . . . At the close of this session, he knew that he was ready to meet him. He jumped to his feet, eager for the meeting.

Out early in the morning to buy a copy of *The Daily Sun* he was not lightly disturbed by the very first bill that met his eye. It hung like an apron over the knees of a paper boy, "AUTHOR OF 'SANDERS.' ASTOUNDING DISCLOSURE." Business men, in sober suits of black, were buying the paper as they hurried to the London trains.

Hastily buying a copy for himself, he stood on the kerb, and with palpitating heart and shaking fingers, turned to the news page. It was the lead story. Two columns of it. Mr. Hope had interpreted in his own remarkable way his promise that there should be no "story." He described the Rev. Antony O'Grogan's street, his tiny little house, his bright little maid, his narrow stairs, and his cheerful, book-lined study. To sharpen the news-value of his tale, he exaggerated the

"comparative poverty" of Mr. O'Grogan's surroundings; he heightened the "surprising youthfulness" of this man whose book was "the talk of two continents"; he deepened the lines that contemplation had ruled along the young author's brow and laughter had graved about his mouth; he placed two very bright high-lights of whimsicality in his eyes; and he made a merry line or two of his habit of pacing up and down as he thought. He even reported Mr. O'Grogan's genial protest when offered payment for his information—" "Oh hell, no!" said this pleasant, unconventional cleric." He subjoined a short biography of "the man of the hour." He wrote of his Irish parentage, his childhood in Kensington, his education at St. Paul's School, his experiences in the war, and the gallant action by which he had won the D.S.O.

Mr. Charles Arthur Hope must have laboured very well between leaving St. Wilfrid's Road and sending his copy to press. One rather admired him.

Tony folded the paper and hurried home; he was afraid of all eyes in the street. It was not unhappy he felt, but uncomfortable. Exultation sparkled in his throat and lit diamond lights in his head, but he had a curious feeling as if the outside of him was naked. He did not want to be seen. Indoors he tossed the paper in front of Honor, saying "It's all out! You'd better read this;" and she read it, and disappointed him because her alarm was so palpably more than her pride. He took the paper up to his room; but he could not open it again lest he uncovered that middle page. Those headlines quivered through him like a rigor. He threw the paper on one side and tried to read a book, but he had no heed to give it; and soon he tossed the book on to the paper and surrendered to thought. 'Fore heaven, it was incredible! It had happened. Fame . . . wealth . . . triumph over his critics. They had questioned his ability to preach to a few hundreds in St. Wilfrid's, and he had found an audience of millions. They had thought his poems very nice for an amateur, and a world was acclaiming his powers. Old school-fellows would be reading of him this morning, old pupils of Stratton Lye, old war friends. The Wyllies would see that paper. The Gabriels would see it. The Gabriels, the Gabriels, the Gabriels! Oh, why weren't Keatings and Derek alive to see that he had flattened out the Gabriels at last?

He supposed the Vicar would be coming to see him soon.

But the Vicar did not come in the morning or in the afternoon. No one came; only a telegram: "*O tony this is wonderful the book is gorgeous why didn't you tell me hurray and hurray peggy.*" And it was followed almost immediately by a second telegram: "*What price the gabriels peggy.*" Ah Keatings, Keatings. . . .

Tony first came face to face with the Vicar in the vestry before evensong, and Mr. Broadley turned his face to the wall and sought his cassock. It was unusual for the Vicar to be there at all; as a rule he resigned the week-day evensongs to his curate. And he did not speak, but, unless Tony mistook it, his silence was heavy as the Horse of Troy with deliveries to come. The Vicar knew; not a doubt of it. Indeed, how could he fail to know? Coming to the church, Tony had seen the placard of an evening paper, "THAMESMOUTH CURATE'S SENSATIONAL BOOK."

Both robed and ready, Mr. Broadley said, "Shall we just——" and mumbled the vestry prayer; and they walked into the Lady Chapel. There was no congregation, so Tony went to the prayer desk on the right of the altar, and the Vicar to the prayer desk on the left, and they recited the office to each other.

Now all the world has remarked that, to people in emotional states, the psalms are apt to speak with a blessed, or accursed, appropriateness, and they did so this evensong. The verses which Mr. Broadley and Tony found themselves exchanging antiphonally, across the chequer-board tiles of the side-chapel, raised in the younger of them a deplorable desire to giggle.

"Many a time," said Tony to the Vicar, "have they fought against me from my youth up, may Israel now say."

"Yea, many a time have they vexed me from my youth up," retorted Mr. Broadley, "but they have not prevailed against me."

"Let them be confounded," suggested Tony, "and turned backward; as many as have evil will at Zion."

"Let them be even as the grass growing upon the house tops," agreed Mr. Broadley.

"Lord, I am not high-minded," Tony affirmed. "I have no proud looks."

"I do not exercise myself in great matters," hinted Mr. Broadley, "which are too high for me."

"But I refrain my soul and keep it low," continued Tony,

"like as a child that is weaned from its mother : yea, my soul is even as a weaned child."

But Mr. Broadley seemed highly sceptical about this.

"O Israel, trust in the Lorder," he recommended scornfully, "from this time forth for evermore."

Back in the vestry, Mr. Broadley preserved his menacing silence, till Tony, getting offended, began to hum a little air to himself, as he hooked up his cassock and took down his jacket. Taking his hat, he moved to go.

"O'Grogan," called the Vicar.

"Yes, Vicar?" Tony halted.

"I suppose this is all true—this news in the paper?"

"About that book? Yes, Vicar."

"Well . . ." Now words treacherously hung back from Mr. Broadley's lips. "Well . . . it . . . I suppose you realize that it makes your position here rather uncomfortable?"

"But why?" Nobody could have sounded more surprised.

Mr. Broadley shrugged. "Oh, you must see it as well as I do. The indignation in the town is tremendous——"

"Oh, no, Vicar; it is not as bad as that. . . . A few people, perhaps."

"A few! Why, if one person has stopped me in the street, a hundred must have done so; and all were shocked beyond measure."

"Oh, no. They were only saying what they thought you'd want to hear."

"Nothing of the sort! They were genuinely shocked. I didn't know I was letting myself in for this, when I offered you the title here; I did not, I *must* say."

"I am very sorry, Vicar; but if people——"

"Alderman Scrase has been to see me, and he's speechless with indignation. Speechless! He talks about leaving us, and going to another church. I will not have my congregation offended and driven away like this."

"Well, what do you suggest?"

"I have been talking it over with both churchwardens, and they went so far—though, mind you," the Vicar hastily added, "I do not necessarily agree with them, however distressed I may be—they suggested that I ought to ask you to resign."

"Resign? What on earth for?"

Mr. Broadley spread impotent hands: if O'Grogan would *not* see, he would not.

"I will not resign on account of that book, Vicar. You may kick me out, but I shall not resign."

"I am not at all sure yet what is the right step," said the Vicar, meditatively. It was his desire that Tony should feel his weight, and have a fright. "I must discuss it further with Scrase and Bray."

"All right, Vicar," Tony agreed; "and I hope you will give them my point of view, which is this: I will not resign on account of the book, because it will look as if I were ashamed of it, which I certainly am not; I am proud of it; they can fire me, if they like, but the onus of doing so must be theirs; and if they do so, it'll look very much as if they were afraid of the book."

"That's nonsense, O'Grogan; nonsense."

"Well, that's as I see it. You see, Vicar," proceeded Tony, not guiltless of a desire to "get some of his own back," "I believe, rightly or wrongly, that I have something to say, and I desire to say it to as large an audience as possible. You gave me but few opportunities of preaching, so I found my audience elsewhere."

"I gave you all the opportunities that are usually accorded to a deacon or a junior priest."

"No, Vicar, you did not. Not after you found I had a habit of saying what I meant. And, anyhow, I don't see why you should all be so perturbed about this particular book. It is not the first I have written."

"Is it not?"

"No. There was a book of poems."

"Oh, *those*——"

"Yes; and there were far worse things implicit in those poems than anything in this very light book."

"There's no parallel, O'Grogan. This book tries to be funny——"

"And I think it succeeds, Vicar. People say so."

"Well, I know nothing about that, O'Grogan," interrupted the Vicar, who did not wish to be jostled from his hectoring position. "What I do know is that, after a book like this, you will find it difficult enough to get another curacy——"

"Oh, no, no, no. . . . There are many churches and congregations with enough sense of humour to admit me on their staff. But even if that were not so, I shouldn't starve. I should write."

"Pooh! Don't lose your head because you've had a little success." ("Little success," confound him!) "What do you suppose this book'll bring you in, before it's done? Five hundred pounds?"

"Seven thousand."

"That's absurd. I've met authors and I know what their books fetch. If you make six or seven hundred, you'll be lucky."

"I have already received over two thousand pounds from England and America; and I haven't the least doubt that the final figure will be every penny of seven thousand pounds. Probably more." ("Vulgar," thought Tony, "but very delightful.") "You see, my American publishers"—these words sounded splendid—"cable to me that they are selling nearly a thousand copies a day. And then there's the play."

"Play? What play?"

"I am making it into a play. And that reminds me: if you and the churchwardens let me stay, I do hope we shall be able to come to some agreement by which I can do perhaps less than a whole-time job, and take correspondingly less pay. At present, my spare time will hardly be enough if I am to meet my engagements. My publishers have already commissioned three more books, and I want to do them. I believe in this work. So, in a sense, you'll be doing me a kindness if you fire me. But I shall be sorry, and I shall take up some ministerial work elsewhere."

The Vicar looked frightened. His talk about resignation had been no more than a pompous threat. He didn't really think the book very dreadful, and couldn't easily have told out of what actual facts he had raised this miasma of indignation, unless it was the fact that Alderman Scrase had threatened to leave. The idea of losing a curate just now, when curates were so difficult to get, was disturbing. The disorganization it would mean, and the effort it would require!

"No. . . . No, O'Grogan, I don't think you ought to resign. No, I don't mind telling you that I took the opposite point of view from Scrase and Bray. I said that, however I might dislike your book—and I do, I do, I confess—I could see that it probably represented the attitude of many Young People To-day, and every point of view should be heard in our pulpit——"

("Apparently," thought Tony, "he thinks the pulpit of St. Wilfrid's an important rostrum in the National Life.")

"—and that, if you had your appeal to Youth and to Our Returned Men, you could be of real value to us."

"Thank you, Vicar."

"So—no, O'Grogan, you mustn't resign. The work is too important."

Tony grinned down upon him disarmingly. One can always grin so, when one has reached the higher ground.

"But supposing I think my new work just as important and much more effective?"

"You must find time for both, my boy. . . . Of course. . . . Yes."

"That is what I should prefer, Vicar."

"Yes . . . well, we can easily manage that. But"—now Mr. Broadley grinned—"I'm afraid you've made a permanent enemy of Scrase."

"I'm sorry for that," said Tony, honestly. "He's a good, if rather stupid, old woman."

The Vicar looked somewhat mazed by this cold-blooded statement of a fact; then decided to recover his smile. "Well, I suppose, between ourselves, he is rather. And Bray's a nonentity, of course. Well, I've no doubt all this'll blow over. But you've given us a shock, my boy—you've given us no end of a shock—ha ha!"

So much easier to be quit of irritation and to be on friendly terms with all—wardens, curate and self! Mr. Broadley and O'Grogan walked out of the church in the friendliest manner, and talked a little more at the gates before parting.

Tony did not go home, but walked up the Thamesmouth hill and stood in a pleasure garden that dropped from the esplanade to the sea. "Happy Valley" men called this playground. The last light of evening filled the world, and the sea was all spangled, under a burnished sky. There may have been colours in sea and sky, but the dazzle and the whiteness veiled them from his sight. He found a blue in the sky only when he saw the moon hanging above the horizon like a pale broken pearl.

The light on his thoughts seemed to match the light on the sea. They were spangled. Impossible to believe that it had happened; that fortune had suddenly given to him all that the millions longed for—to *him*; that a phrase like "success beyond his wildest hopes" was actually true of *him*—of him who stood here; that in a day he had stepped out from the great multitude

of the unknown, and taken his place among the few who were known of all men. And this tingling sense of power—he had felt it so when he was talking to poor old Broadley—was it illusory, or was it really true—this overwhelming assurance that he could do much larger and better things than “Sanders,” and, before he died, create a name that the world would remember? This evening he believed it to be true.

Benedicite sol et luna.

PART II

CHAPTER I

THE MONK AND THE EGOIST

WITHIN Antony O'Grogan, and he knew it well, two persons warred : a spoiled monk, and one who was the opposite of a monk, a creature avid for worldly triumphs and comfort and wealth, and dreaming often of passion and love. Probably the same two persons war in every man, and the conflict in him was merely sharper.

It was the turn of the second creature now. The spoiled monk would have needed to be much stronger if he was not to be spoiled yet further by the success and notoriety that came to Antony O'Grogan now. He was an author "read in two continents"; and his first book "Pass, Friends; All's Well," of which so few copies had been printed, was being sought by collectors and bought at high prices. He was a successful playwright. He was a popular preacher, drawing crowds to St. Wilfrid's, and pestered with invitations from all the livelier churches of England. He could not but see that he had drawn a new element into the congregation of St. Wilfrid's—those who said, "I'd go to church more often if I could be sure of hearing sane, entertaining stuff like his." Mr. Broadley, from his stall, observed these new-comers too, and, though a thought jealous at first, was not in the end displeased. He decided, instead, to plume himself on his wisdom in "permitting every point of view to be represented in our pulpit."

"This is just what I had in mind when I secured O'Grogan," he said to his warden. "He's young and vigorous, and appeals to Youth and to Our Returned Men. Yes, I was right in resisting you, Scrase, and keeping him."

But the Alderman was never to be appeased. "If you think so, Vicar, well and good. It is in your sphere, not mine. But don't expect me to be in my place when that

young man preaches. I consider him a very dangerous young man. That is my opinion and I shall not alter it. And there are others who think with me."

Tony could see well enough that all this success was ministering, not to the ascetic in him, but to that other intensely personal Tony. He had always been able to read himself with merciless eyes; indeed, it is possible he erred on the side of reading himself as worse than he was. But this is what he saw. He saw that the strongest motive behind his preaching now was the desire to preserve and increase his fame. His larger passion now was, not to serve the world, but to serve his own ends; and it grew and grew while the other dwindled. He would scamp his humdrum parish work, and escape as quickly as possible into his study where he could shut out the care of the churches and lose himself in the creation of a new book that should surpass "Sanders" in its brilliance and success. All interruptions vexed him; he was irritable with Honor, if she invaded his loneliness for one brief minute; he would even open the door and throw a rebuke at her if she made a noise in the passage. Impatience with all the simple, un-intellectual folk of Thamesmouth swelled in him, till he could no longer suffer them at all; they had nothing to give him that would help forward his ambitions, and he cared only, nowadays, for those few people who, because they were interested in the things of the mind and spoke his own currency, could give him much and enlarge and stimulate his brain. And as there were not six of these in his Thamesmouth circle, and as Honor was certainly not one of the six, he retired into books. He became a bookworm, mentally indefatigable but bodily slack. Nightly he reclined in a long deep arm-chair, sitting (as he put it) less on his tail than on his shoulder-blades, and read and read and read. Honor sat at his side with her work, but he hardly answered her when she spoke, because he found her talk inept. Sometimes he did not even hear her.

This new craving for privacy, this recoil from his fellows unless they had something to give him, this fast-ripening irritability, and the bodily inertia that had come with them, could frighten him in those hours when the other Antony awoke. Did they mean that the self-centredness which had always threatened him was going to win, hands down? Did they mean that he who had wanted to love all men was going

to end by loving no one, needing no one, and being alone? He was thirty-six—nearly forty; did they mean that age was going to weave an ugly mantle about him? Would the laughter and affection die out of his eyes, and a self-centred remoteness, glazing them, repel the advance of friends? Would selfishness square his mouth, as he had seen it do in Mr. Broadley and other middle-aged men? And would age find him utterly alone in that self-made prison of the loveless? Probably. He was exchanging affection and understanding for indifference; pity for heartlessness and cruelty, because there had always lurked in him, as in every man threatened by a consuming egotism, the seeds of cruelty. As a boy, had he not been cruel to little Wavers, and to Frank Doyly and to Honor when he was fighting for their love? And God! that pill-box at Passchendaele! Had his pity for those poor trapped Germans weighed anything against his desire to re-establish his fame? No, he had hurled his bomb. . . . Oh, but these were dreadful thoughts, and not the whole truth: there *was* that other side of him, which had loved and pitied many men and striven to help them. Was this better part to perish in the end?

No. He must save it, and work some harmony between it and the earthier self; and then surely the whole man would be—not the ascetic any more—but a reasonably decent creature. But alas! these hours of fine resolve became fewer and fewer. He watched the worldliness spread to wider and wider occupation, and ceased to worry over the conquest. If his values were all vulgar now, well, what of it? He was happy in them. Exultant. He was wealthy—think of it! He who had wrestled all his life with the coils of poverty had now a cosy £10,000 encased in the best securities and the certainty that, for some years at any rate, he would be able to add to it from the balance of a generous income. He had a large house in West Thamesmouth, near the Scrases—"that'd learn 'em a thing or two, the old dears"—and a deferential manservant, called Paston, of whom he was secretly very proud. He had a handsome car, and rejoiced to show himself in it about the streets of his parish. "That'll teach 'em, those who thought I couldn't be a writer of any moment, because I was only an ill-paid curate. I confess it pleases me. It's no good, Honor, my child: in these days of psycho-analysis one must accept oneself as one is; and I am, I regret to find, something of a

swanker. So are you; only you don't admit it. You enjoy a little ostentation."

And success completed the wall that had long been building between Honor and him. In the days when he was attempting sanctity he had tried to dissolve in humour and selflessness the knowledge that she was his companion and little more. But now, sanctity being forsworn, he no longer tried to dissolve it. Instead, brooding over his pipe, he strengthened it. There was a night when she rejected his caresses; and he shivered into himself, and did not speak to her for days. And she asked him at last: "Why are you always so silent and sulky now?"

"Sulky!" he scoffed. "Sulky! Can't you tell the difference between the silence of sulkiness and the silence of misery?"

"Well," she said, "it's a pity you're getting like this because we might have such fun together."

Such fun. Poor child; when she said that, he filled with pity for her—and with resentment. Pity that she should want her fun, and resentment that she should think him content with fun, when the one thing needful was missing. She was content with it, and content to think *him* content with it. Dammit, that was her offence. It would do her good—it would wake her to reality—if he proved that another woman would willingly and joyously fill up all his need. Oh, the mere thought of finding this woman could tighten his throat and empty his body of breath, while his heart sang. He felt like a child released to play in the meadows.

He conceived of her as young and lovely and passionate. His had always been a downward gazing love, seeking the adorer, and the sweet thing to cherish. He had but to say, "Daughter-lover," and his heart went apace with foretasted joy. And he believed that if he found her, he could win her. Fêted and flattered wherever he went to preach or lecture, he had learned, and with some surprise at the humility which so far had hidden it from view, that he was attractive to women. He remembered his father, Dr. Ernest O'Grogan, and all the "Ernest worshippers" who had fluttered about him. Dr. O'Grogan's woman had denied him life; and he had suddenly thrown up all things else, and taken it.

"And I have missed it too," thought Tony, as many another man has thought, nearing forty.

Was he going to miss it for want of courage? He

played always with this lovely, breath-breaking question. Sometimes he dreamed of a new and better marriage; sometimes of a grand passion, a parting, and a sentimental memory in two minds for ever. He did not know the fire that he was building. But he knew now that if he saw this girl-lover of his choice, and she would come, he would take her through it with him.

And then America invited him to lecture in her cities, and he went there, and saw her.

O Mary . . . Mary. . . .

CHAPTER II

ONE DAY IN NEW YORK

IT was an inert and empty Antony O'Grogan who arrived in New York at the end of his lecture tour. He had been shaken empty by fifty trains ; he had been sucked empty by unnumbered reporters ; and the shell of him had been bruised and flogged by the buffeting kindness of a hundred hosts and hostesses. To these hosts and hostesses, one after another, he had been passed like a punch-ball on which they could take a turn at exercising their remarkable powers of hospitality. They had changed with every sun, but all had come to their exercise as fresh and exuberant as he was jaded.

And now a sorrowful sense of the unreality of the whole tour was oppressing him. After the first six performances, his lecture had become word-perfect, and set in his head like a pudding in a mould, so that the remaining forty-five performances had been nothing more than recitations declaimed by an actor. The first time he had delivered his address he had stepped off the platform with the comfortable certainty that it was a magnificent oration ; the sixth time, as he heard it flowing in easy spate out of his mouth, he had begun to dislike it as a river of nauseating cant ; the fiftieth time, as the people laughed at the glib and tedious jokes, rose in acclamation to its sonorous close, and complimented him afterwards on being able to speak for an hour without a note, he had come to think of it as one of the great shams of the world. He felt a brother to Baron Munchausen.

Never before had he amassed such a sense that the whole field of civilization was choked with the waving weeds of social insincerity. Naturalness was hardly to be found anywhere ; only a universal discordance between the thing that was done, or spoken, and the thing that was really felt.

"Simplicity. . . . Simplicity. . . ." As often happens,

when one cannot clear one's thoughts, single words that seemed to express something of what he missed and needed kept repeating themselves behind his lips. "Simplicity. . . . Stillness. . . . Ease."

And while he muttered these words, sitting in the monstrous rotunda of his hotel—a marble hall that was partly a lounge and partly an arcade of shops, and wholly vulgar—a bell-boy came through the unreal crowds, singing his name like a street-cry: "Mister Oh-Gro-gahn. . . . Mister Oh-Gro-gahn. . . ." The bell-boy, a child of four feet high, who ought to have been out in the fields dreaming of bears behind a copse, was clad in a preposterous skin-tight uniform of violet serge, a-blow with buttons, and his voice was harshened and his round face cunning.

Tony rose and walked towards him.

"Here I am."

The boy presented a card on a salver, and Tony took it. Its inscription was "Miss Mary Dulcis Leith."

Leith. For a few moments he could not guess who she might be. Then he remembered. He remembered the exuberant and overwhelming daughter of his hundredth hostess, who had shouted, "Gee," if he was going to New York, she would at once write to her room-mate, Mary Leith, who was in New York right now, and instruct her to take him in hand and show him round the city. And Tony had said, "Thank you very much. That's frightfully kind of you," and had prayed Heaven that she would do nothing of the sort. But she had done it; of course she had; was she the sort to spare herself in kindness? She had written exuberantly to Mary Leith; and here, no doubt, was another overwhelming and exuberant girl, wanting to work off on him a day's catharsis of her abounding hospitality.

"Where is the lady?" he asked of the bell-boy.

The child raised a face that should have been a guileless flower but was, instead, an indecent hot-house creation of pertness and cunning.

"She's just inside the door. She wouldn't come any further."

"Why not?" Tony began to be interested in Mary Leith. The girl, it would seem, had some quality of reserve.

"I don't know. I guess she's shy."

"Is there anything shy on this continent?" asked Tony,

who felt that this uniformed doll would be quite his equal in an intellectual argument. "If so, I'd better come and see it."

"This way, Mr. O'Grogan."

The boy led him on to the soft carpets of the Entrance Hall, gave a humorous inclination of his head towards a figure standing by the revolving doors, and disappeared. Tony went towards the figure, providing on his lips the unreal social smile. She turned and looked up at him; and there happened in Antony O'Grogan's life what had happened many times before. It had happened with little Wavers, when Tony was a boy of eleven; with Sybil Chandry, when he was a youth of sixteen; with Frank Doyly, when he was a young master at Stratton Lye. If a face can be said to stab anyone to the heart, the face of Mary Leith stabbed Antony O'Grogan then.

Her face was quite beautiful. It had a high white forehead framed in black hair that was parted in the middle and coiled over the ears; black eyebrows as delicately curved as they were delicately pencilled; deep brown eyes, long-lashed; a soft straight nose; a soft mouth; and a small pointed chin. Her expression was lovely in its pensiveness. Her figure was less than beautiful; the shoulders sloped a degree too much to the long thin arms, and the whole frail body drooped a little, as it stood relaxed and thoughtful. But the figure did not seem to matter after a glimpse of that face; and, anyhow, it was pleasing enough in its spare childishness.

Tony, looking down upon her, felt an inexplicable sense of rest.

"Oh . . . are you Mr. O'Grogan?" she asked.

"Yes."

Her cheeks, pale as ivory, coloured faintly.

"Oh, Mabel wrote and asked me to look you up and show you round New York."

"I remember. . . ."

"I—I should love to take you . . . but I'm sure you don't want to come. You must be so tired."

He was about to reply, "Not a bit, my child," but the lie of it, to his surprise, offended his curious sense of rest.

"I do feel most abominably tired," he said.

"Ah, I guessed so." Undoubtedly a disappointment rang in her voice. "Well . . . never mind. . . ."

"But I'm coming somewhere with you, thank you very much."

"Oh, will you? Will you really? That'll be just marvellous. When shall it be?"

"It'll have to be to-day, because to-morrow I go to Quebec, and sail for home." And, as he said it, he felt, quick and unexpected—he who had been longing for the quiet of his homeward ship—a throb of pain.

"Oh, well, let it be to-day. That'll be just marvellous."

"Marvellous? Why?"

"Oh, I don't know why I said that. . . . Yes, I do, though. After all, you are *you*, aren't you?"

"Certainly. And you are you."

"Yes, but . . . Oh, heck!" It was so difficult to explain.

"Oh, *what*?"

"Oh, *heck*." She frowned in a merry surprise that he should not know this commonplace expression.

"Yes . . . I seem to remember having heard that phrase before."

"Of course you have. It's good Christian English. . . . But what would you like to see? Listen: shall we go to——" and she mentioned some of the sights of New York, none of which he remembered, because he was not listening to them.

"Would you like to see these?"

"Not in the least."

"Well, where *would* you like to go?"

"Anywhere out of civilization."

"What does that mean?"

"Anywhere where things are simple and quiet and natural."

The beautiful eyebrows arched in amusement. "Well, I don't know where that is."

"Nor do I."

"Oh, dear!" She pretended to impatience with him. "Well, anyway, I'll go and get the car and try and find it somewhere."

"Oh, have you a car? I'm sorry."

"Why?"

"Oh, I dunno. Everybody has a car here. It's so ordinary to have a car."

"But I *am* ordinary."

Tony only grinned and did not answer this ; but his grin covered some such thought as, " I suppose you are, in reality ; I suppose there are many other girls as beautiful as you, but to whoever shall fall in love with you—and I am very jealous of him—you will be too extraordinary. You will be incredible."

Mary turned away her face, and her profile troubled him as her full face had done ; it seemed almost more beautiful.

" Well, listen," she said. " Shall I get the car now ? Shall I come back with it in about an hour's time ? "

" In about three-quarters of an hour's time."

" All right. Yes, yes ; I can do that."

" Then let us say in about half an hour's time."

" Ye-es. All right."

" Then let us make it twenty minutes. I shall be waiting for you. And please : I shall be wanting you all day."

" Oh, yes, yes ! That'll be just marvellous."

She was gone with something of a skip, leaving him to walk up and down the monstrous rotunda with strange, sweet thoughts.

Twenty minutes later a Buick saloon car rolled up to the steps of the hotel. Mary leapt out with a lively grace and ran up the steps and through the doors.

" Will you come right now ? " she inquired of Tony, into whom she had almost bumped, for he had been watching her through the glass of the doors.

" Sure," replied he, imitating what he conceived to be her Americanism. " I'll come right now."

And he walked down with her and sat in the seat by the driver's. There was a brown-paper parcel in his hand, of the shape of a two-dollar novel. This he tossed carelessly on to the seat behind.

They drove away. They drove through a din of clanging street cars, hooting automobiles, and shrieking overhead railways, but Tony was hardly aware of any of these things. He never saw New York, and learned nothing of it till years afterwards. All his awareness was given to the girl whose hands were on the wheel. He knew that her hands were less beautiful than her face ; and behind this knowledge the traffic roared.

" May I ask how old you are ? "

" Twenty," she said ; and he knew that he had suffered

a dim pain because she was only twenty. If she had but said twenty-two, it would have hurt him less, though it would have hurt him still. And behind this knowledge the white cliffs of great buildings, and the window-fronts of great stores, went by.

"Well, you look less, my child. I should have put you at seventeen."

"Don't be ridiculous."

"And don't you be insincere. You *know* you look no more than seventeen. You're probably very conceited about it."

"Well, really! . . ."

"Exactly. Let's say what we *really* think. For instance, I am trying to think that you are much more genuine and natural than anyone else I've met. But I don't know that I *really* think it. Probably you're not. Probably you're quite as big a humbug as I am and everybody else is—but let me think it of you. Do you mind?"

"Not at all. But I *am* a humbug, I think; an awful humbug."

"At times. At times, no doubt," Tony allowed, somewhat disconcertingly. "But not by nature. No, no. . . . And fancy being only twenty. What does it feel like to be young?"

"Well, you're not exactly a grandfather yourself."

"I'm nearly forty." And as he said it, the ache which had throbbed when she said she was twenty, throbbed again.

"Well, what's forty?"

"As a matter of fact, I'm only thirty-seven; but forty's looming, and it looks awful to me. It looks like the beginning of the end."

"That's just ridiculous."

The car rolled on, and then gradually slowed, as if she had been visited by an idea and was examining it. "Listen," she said; "would you mind if I took you to see a friend?"

"Oh, must you?"

"Not if you'd rather not, but——"

"No, please. I want to do anything you wish."

"Oh, good! It won't take long. And I just want to show you to him, that's all."

Him. The word hurt. How was it that he could be at once so happy and at rest in the companionship of this lovely child, and yet be wounded by everything about her? That

"him" had gone through him, not like a sword's thrust, but like the fear of a sword's thrust. He said nothing.

The car swung to the right after the next block, and then to the right again; and they were back on the narrow ravine floor, between the faces of the great sky-scrapers. The traffic roared round them and past them, but Tony heard nothing at all, till Mary's voice laid itself against the muffled din behind.

"He's really rather a dear."

"Who?"

"Mr. Bragg, whom we're going to see."

Bragg. It was an ugly enough name, thank Heaven.

"Is he—is he young . . . or old . . . or what?"

"Fifty-five-ish."

Delight, most unwarrantable, flooded him.

"He's been ill," explained Mary, "and I often go round and see him. I sometimes take him out for a drive. He's one of Father's greatest friends, and a perfect dear, really. . . . And this is his apartment."

Then they were in a drawing-room, and he was speaking with Mr. Bragg, a short, grey-haired old gentleman to whom, Tony thought, this child had been generous in allotting no more than fifty-five years. All Mr. Bragg's talk was praise of Mary. "An angel of mercy who takes pity on a poor old man. A very bright young lady; a very bright young lady indeed. And such a heart!" He twinkled at her jovially and affectionately. "Such a heart! Such a heart!" Each of these tributes gave the same unwarrantable pleasure to Tony: it was as if he were gathering blooms to complete a bouquet he desired. "Yessir," twinkled the old man; "I fear for her; and that's the truth. It's dangerous to go through the world with a heart like that." Tony returned a smile, and it was a smile of gratification. Truly it seemed as if these compliments were being paid to something of his own.

Then they were back in the car; and she had said, "Now we can go any old where," and at the ordinary slang of it, for some absurd reason, he had taken a slight fall. The car purled on through the racketing streets, and their talk was very pleasant and peaceful, yet ever and again, the slight pain shot through it. She asked him about his wife, and the pain was there. Quickly he left the topic. She asked him if he had children, and that she should ask him this so lightly hurt

him. She spoke about his work as a clergyman, and the pain was there again; and he found himself explaining that he was a very restive parson, rebellious against much. And he suggested hurriedly: "But let's talk about you. Not about me. Have you brothers or sisters?"

"No; only Father."

"I see. And what are you going to do with your life?"

"Oh, I don't know."

"I do. You'll marry very soon." Again the pain, but sharper than ever before.

"I don't think so. I'm not keen on it. No, I think I'd like to travel all the winter—with Daddy, perhaps, if I thought he was lonely and sad; and in the summer, and in the fall, I'd like to have a cottage by a lake in Western Ontario. I should live there alone."

"In pity's name why?"

"Oh, but I should ask all the nice people that I love to stay with me, and we'd——"

"Do you love people?"

"Yes. Oh, *yes*. Don't you? But listen: and then we'd picnic by the lake and bathe and go on canoeing parties among the woods. It'd be marvellous."

"Strange child! But you must marry."

"Why?"

"Well, to begin with, unless I've got you all wrong—you could give so much."

Silence.

"Yes. What else?" Mary was much interested.

"And then there's——" Tony frowned as he sought for words; and his lips parted several times before he spoke. Then he started a debate on the desiccation of a woman's beauty if she withheld herself from marriage. To him, who was of an earlier generation the subject seemed a rather sensitive plant to offer to the touch of a young girl, but Mary was not in the least afraid of it. She touched it and opened it with a sparkling interest; and often he turned to watch her profile, as she too parted lips or lifted brows, waiting for her words to come. These movements of her mouth and her brows pleased him; and those of her hands too, which she would lift off the steering-wheel, as she exclaimed, "Oh, heck!" in despair of being able to express her meaning.

He asked her how she spent her days; and she told him that

she loved dancing above all things; that night after night she would go out "with a lad, Jimmy Faulkner"; and that "Daddy would get all hot and bothered sometimes when she came home at three o'clock in the morning, so that it would be four o'clock before she had soothed him down, and they could all go to bed"—and as she said it, Tony took, both together, the slight fall and the curious pain. The fall, because her words made her sound lighter than, in his foolishness, he had wished to think her; and the pain because of Jimmy Faulkner. The pain was enough to demand its relief in the question: "This Jimmy Someone? He's in love with you, of course?"

Mary laughed over her wheel. "Good gracious, no! Why on earth should you think that?"

"My child, because——"

"Because what?"

"Well . . . you see . . . well . . ." He hesitated most exasperatingly.

"Well what?"

"It's so difficult to say without appearing to flatter."

At this she gave all her attention to the road ahead and the steering-wheel; but as Tony did not continue, she was compelled to ask him. "Please go on. I simply must hear what you were going to say."

"You have asked me to?"

"Yes, please."

"Well, take the consequences then. My child, have you any idea how beautiful you are?"

The colour took the ivory from her cheeks, and had its way with them.

"Oh, that's just ridiculous."

"It is not. It is the simple truth, my dear."

"Besides, even if it were so——"

"There's no 'even if' about it——"

"Oh, *do* be quiet! Even if it were so, I don't see what that's got to do with it. But listen: it's half-after-one, and I think I know of a good place for lunch."

"Half-after-one!" mimicked Tony. "What a language!"

It was now that the important and even exciting fact emerged that she was not American, but Canadian. Mary gave a scream when he called her American, and affected some indignation that he had not distinguished the accent of the Dominion

from that of the States ; and Tony gave something like a cheer when he heard the truth. Oh, no—mercy, no—her home was in Montreal, and she had only gone to school in New York. And at present she was only staying with an uncle and aunt who had come to the States several years before.

“ Well, hurray, hurray, hurray,” said Tony.

“ I don’t quite see why it should please you so,” she laughed.

“ I haven’t the faintest idea why it does, either,” he admitted.

“ But it does.”

“ Listen,” said she ; “ there’s where we have lunch.”

He had no memory afterwards of the outside of the great store that he now entered, but he had a vivid memory of the spacious and pillared temple, on its top floor, where they sat face to face at a table, over a two-dollar lunch. On this table he laid the brown-paper parcel, undid its wrapping, and produced a copy of one of his own books.

“ May I give you this in gratitude for to-day ? ” he asked.

She saw what it was, and clapped her hands together. “ Oh, how wonderful ! I shall treasure it always.”

“ I didn’t produce it before,” he said, taking his fountain pen and unscrewing the cap, “ because I wanted to know you well enough to write just ‘ Mary ’ in it. May I do that ? ”

“ Of course,” she murmured, rather softly.

And he wrote on its title page :

“ MARY
from
ANTONY O’GROGAN.”

When the afternoon sun began to drop low that day, they were still driving on. Once she stopped the car, rested her hands upon the wheel, and turned and looked at him.

“ This is mad,” she laughed. “ Just driving aimlessly about. Isn’t there anywhere you’d like to go ? ”

“ I’m perfectly happy,” he answered.

In mock despair she hunched forward and dropped her hands to her lap. “ Listen : there’s a famous church not far from here. Would you like to see that ? ”

“ Not in the least.”

“ Oh, bother you ! You’re not very helpful, are you ? ”

“ Not in the least.”

“ Oh, don’t be so dumb.”

“ So *what* ? ”

“ So ‘ dumb.’ ‘ Foolish,’ that means, and it’s excellent English. We must go somewhere.”

“ All right, my child. Let’s go to church.”

They went to the church. They walked inside it and came out of it ; and two minutes afterwards he could remember very little about it, except its shape. For, as they got into the car again and began to drive away, something happened which was so much more vivid than the church that it hazed the memory of that edifice for ever. He was staring ahead of him through the wind-screen when he became acutely conscious that she had turned her face towards him and was studying his profile. Probably she did not know that he had observed the movement, because she continued gazing at him for a long time, while the car hummed onward down the straight road. Not daring to turn and meet her eyes, he did not know whether they were mischievous or very wondering. And presently she gave them back to the road before her.

They had tea in some Garden Restaurant—Heaven knew where—and the sun was gone from the day as they drove out of the garden. After a moment of indecision she turned the car down the way they had come.

“ That means we are going home,” he sighed.

“ Yes, I’m afraid so.”

Evenly and quietly the car purled towards the city, carrying two silent persons. The noisy streets spread themselves about it, and the hotel, where the parting waited, rushed towards it, till Tony, in despair, asked quickly, “ I suppose you couldn’t come out after your dinner ? I’ve so little time, and I—I know no one else. We might go and dance somewhere. You like dancing.”

“ Oh, do *you* dance ? ”

“ Yes, of course. Why not ? ”

“ I don’t know. I didn’t suppose you would.” Tony heard her voice saying it brightly ; and far away, somewhere, the old pain throbbed.

“ Will you come ? ” he persisted.

She did not answer, and the hotel rushed nearer.

“ Will you ? ”

"Yes. . . . Oh, yes, I should love to. Thank you so much."

They parted at the hotel steps, Mary blithely waving and Tony watching her car till it was out of sight. Then, swinging round, he entered the hotel and climbed a thousand stairs to his room. He could think better, climbing alone than keeping company with a bell-boy in an elevator. In his room he gave great pains to his dressing and shaved for the second time that day. After his shave he passed the soft of his hand along his mouth to test its smoothness. He was going to kiss Mary before this night had gone into the past.

At dinner he joined another Englishman whose acquaintance he had made at breakfast; and when their cigars were in their mouths he led this friend to a seat in the entrance hall. The clock said a quarter to eight. Mary had promised to be there by eight. Talk tossed idly between the two men, while the eyes of one swung always to the dazzling light and loud murmur of the street, beyond the revolving doors. Ah, praise God!—she was ten minutes ahead of her time—bless her! The Buick was there.

"Come," said he to his friend, "and see the most beautiful child I have discovered in America."

This is not an invitation that any man is likely to decline; and the friend rose from his coffee with extraordinary promptitude.

"I have been," said Tony, as they walked to the doors, "across the whole of this darned continent, and from its Northern to its Southern states, and I have seen nothing like her anywhere. And she doesn't belong to them, thank the Lord, but to us. She's a Canadian."

They were now on the steps, and he presented the Englishman to Mary, feeling that unwarrantable pride of possession as he did so.

Then Mary and he went down the steps to the car.

"Have you any idea where we are going?" she asked when the car was clear of the hotel.

"Not in the least."

Her laugh rippled past him in the darkness. "Listen," she began; "suppose we don't dance. I don't think I really want to."

"I never had the least desire to," he assured her.

"Well, why did you suggest it?"

"Just to keep you by me a little longer."

As there was no reply she could offer to this, she only asked, "Well, what shall we do?"

"Listen, Mary. Couldn't we drive to some green places where it's quiet, and perhaps halt the car. Then we could just talk."

"Oh, yes; that'd be just marvellous."

(Why "marvellous?" Why had she said that? Anything less marvellous for her he could hardly imagine, unless——)

Driving on. On and on, without a word spoken. Out of the city and into quiet roads where there were trees, and the lights were far apart, and night could rest upon the earth. But slowly, and yet more slowly. Why was she slowing the car? Did she, too, long to stop it and——

Her slowing of the car gave him courage to speak. "Let's halt it here, shall we?"

Without an answer she applied the brake and shut off the engine. The car was still; but her hands yet rested on the wheel, almost sadly. Her hands were two pale spirit-hands in the darkness; her face a floating mist.

He turned to his own window and away from her. He saw that they had stopped at the side of a long straight road which crossed a green park. They had not even sheltered under trees, though there was a clump of trees farther on. Strangely dark, this open place, after the dazzle of the city streets; a single light burned at a distance along the road. Strangely quiet, too; far away the hum of a car faded and faded till it was lost in the night.

And now in this pause he had nothing to say. He did not feel that he wanted to speak: he wanted only in that darkness to put his arm round her shoulder and draw her against him. He tried to compel his arm to this task, but restless, leaping thoughts sapped the blood of resolution; and he could not. Mary sat silent too. At last he bade resolution rebut the crowding thoughts; and his arm went round her and drew her to him.

"Tell me all about yourself," he said.

Her head had drooped, and she had not come willingly to him. Nor had she answered.

Bending his head to hers he put his lips upon her hair.

"No," she said; and lowered her head still further.

He took away his arm; and Mary lifted her head and gave

her face to the other window. A silence, like the darkness, sat between them till once more he gathered her shoulders in his arm and tried to kiss her white forehead.

"No," she said.

"Let me kiss you good-bye," he begged. "I don't suppose I shall ever see you again."

"No. Please not."

Instead, when the darkness in the car was emptied of this mystery, they talked, and naturally, of things that interested them both. And of a sudden she announced with all her happy sparkle, "Come; we must go back now."

With a brisk movement she set the car on its homeward journey. It raced on, and the city lights drew near them. And now, as in the afternoon, the sight of the city ready to take them into its heart and there part them, seemed to force her to slow down her engine. Yes, the car was slowing—slowing. It had stopped; and she was sitting back with her hands in her lap.

Why had she stopped? Was it that she would like him to kiss her after all? He gathered her again, and with a hand on her cheek tried to turn her face upward. For a moment she came with the whole gift of herself towards him, and her lips touched his; then she fell away.

"Ah, no," she said.

And sighing, she put her fingers on the switch of the engine, but could not bring herself to turn it at once.

"Mary," he asked, "are we far from home?"

"No. Only a little way."

"Then I shall leave you here, I think. Shall I?"

"Yes, please. . . . Yes . . . perhaps."

"Good-bye, my dear."

Her hand came to rest on his; and he took it up and kissed it.

"Good-bye, you dear, dear thing." He gave the hand a strong pressure, released it slowly, and left her.

A great white ship with three funnels moved away from her berth at Quebec, and put out into the Gulf of St. Lawrence. The *Empress of the Isles* was leaving for England. Her passengers leaned on her rails to see the last of the tin sheds, the climbing roofs, and the peaks of the Château

Frontenac high in the sky. They waved to their friends on the quay. Or they stood there lonely and watched others waving. Lonely? *All* were lonely, those with the friends hardly less than the others. Cheery and facetious ones, or sorrowful and weeping ones, they could give no more than their fringes to these friends : each was a prisoner in the inescapable loneliness which was himself. And the ship carried them on : she was the active thing, and they passive in her power.

Antony was among them, and, like the others, was shut in with his thoughts. Well, she had been very sweet, and some of the glances of her eyes would hang in his mind with their riddle for ever. Had this ship not carried him away, he would have gone on with the enterprise, wondering if she were the answer to the old aching need. He would not have turned from her, in his own strength, as he turned from Jill Daubeney, years and years ago. Gosh, how many years ago was it? 1914—just as the war broke. Eleven years, and he was a young man then. Straightening himself at the deck-rail, he smiled to remember that intense youth who had turned in his own strength from the chance of a new love with Jill Daubeney. “I said, I remember : ‘No, I will *not* succumb to the old craving. I believe in it no more. I loved Honor once and it didn’t last ; and I won’t try it out again. . . . I am free ! I am free ! ’”

Had he been a fool in that hour? Or had he been wise? After all, Honor’s response to his love had been very dubious in the beginning ; he had had to drag it out of her ; and quickly it had sprung back to affection and companionship. With another it might have been different. “I don’t know. Anyhow, this time I have left it to the ship. The ship has decided for me.”

The ship was clearing the last of Quebec, and most of the people had dispersed to their unpacking. Through the windows of the lounge came the noise of the stewards laying the tea-tables, and the musicians tuning up their instruments, for it was four o’clock in the afternoon.

Suddenly he saw it all under the white light of reason : what a wild dream ! a child of twenty, and a married man nearly forty who was a priest. But . . . The white light was quickly out, and he was living again that day in New York, searching in it for every word and every action of hers that had looked like the sap of love breaking into tiny leaf. Or

had they all meant nothing more than the attraction of a day? Perhaps she was flirting with him. But her "Ah, no," seemed to give the lie to that. It had been soft, but it had rung with real feeling. No, he must believe that something more than flirtation had moved in that dark car then. Oh, fool, fool! pull yourself together. Who would be at the mercy of one's imagination like this?

Yes, but one was.

The Gulf had widened, and Canada was passing by. A sea of watered silk lay between him and the wooded shore. Some islands appeared as if floating in still lakes; and they swung round in their water as the ship went on. Far away behind, and pale as the background of a water-colour, ran the line of the Laurentian mountains. Canada! He had seen no more than its gateway, but henceforth he was going to love the whole vast continent of it, from the Atlantic to the Pacific, from the Great Lakes to Alaska.

Somewhere within it were the lakes of Western Ontario.

Fool.

Here was a bell-boy coming this way—was he going to speak to him? Yes, the child had a searching and purposeful air.

"The Reverend O'Grogan, sir?"

"Yes."

"A letter for you, sir."

"A letter?"

"Yes, sir. The mail's just been sorted."

Tony took the letter. The address was in a youthful hand, and the postmark was "New York." With a heart misbeating like a young lover's he tore the envelope and read:

"Dear Mr. O'Grogan,

"You see I remembered the ship you were going in and the time of its sailing and I thought I'd just like to be one of those who wished you a good voyage——"

"One of those!" Who else had done so?

"I did so enjoy that day in New York, it was lovely. I am writing this late at night so as to be sure of getting it off by an early mail in time for the boat. Oh, heck, I don't know what to say, I feel so dumb at half-after-one at night—all of which is good English. I

want you to know that I shall be thinking of you at the time the boat sails. I have not had a minute to write it before because I have been so terribly busy. I was dancing all last night ! ! !—

“Dancing ?” With whom ? Damn the man !

“ Good-bye. I do hope we shall meet again some time, perhaps in England one day. I am reading your book and I think it so wonderful.

“ Sincerely,

“ Mary Leith.”

“ Oh, I did enjoy that day ! It was marvellous and I shall never never forget it.”

“ I did so enjoy that day ”—that was ordinary enough. But “ I remembered the time of its sailing ” and “ I shall be thinking of you ”—these were good. And best of all : “ It was marvellous and I shall never never forget it ”—Mary’s heart had forced that postscript from her. But—oh, fall of disappointment ! “ I have not had a minute to write it before because I have been so terribly busy.” Then she hadn’t spent the days thinking of him. Of course not. Why should she ?

Ah, damn ! One must be done with this foolishness. But not as with Jill ; not of one’s own will, but because of the ship’s will. The ship was going on, and fast now : one could hear its continuing sigh through the tranquil water. He looked down, and saw the water foaming past the hull, and then fanning out behind in a wash of rhythmic undulations, that seemed to go on and on till they touched those shores of Canada, where the little white farmhouses stood among the maple and the spruce. Slowly he tore the letter across and across till it was in many pieces ; and these he let fall from sad, unwilling fingers. The breeze took them, the Gulf received them, and the wash dandled them on its surface as long as they could be seen.

CHAPTER III

THE GREAT STRIKE

HIS mind was quickly free of her. Home again in England, he sank back into the creation of a new book. A desire had waxed stronger in his life than the desire to create a perfect and enduring love, and it was the desire to create a perfect and enduring book, and, with it, a perfect and enduring fame. All things fed this altar now. He could even take pleasure in the failure of his marriage and the balking of his hunger when he saw them as fuel for the creation of some beautiful flame. He still sought the grand romance, looking for it in every woman's face ; but not merely for its own sake now ; he could think of it as an experience that would be of value to him as an artist. Yes, he was liberated from Mary, if he was seeking round for another face. Sometimes when his newspaper spoke of Canada or showed him a picture of New York, she would come out of her exile and quicken his tenderness, but he would be surprised that he could remember her features no more. He saw only an oval face and black hair parted in the middle, a long white neck and sloping shoulders. Had that hair been smooth or waving ?

As in the war years, when he had set his pin-prick trouble in a vast canvas of quarrelling worlds and seen it more clearly than anything around it, so now England was shaping into a dark and important background behind him and his solitary thoughts. England was a scene overhung, not with the threat of war, but with the threat of revolution. Tony did not at first give the threat much interest or study ; he had so little to spare from his books. But when an excitement lit up the first days of May, 1926, with a brilliance hardly less dazzling than that of the first days of August, 1914, he awoke to it with a thrill. And when it brightened to the certainty of conflict,

he rushed into it as eagerly as he had rushed into the brilliance of twelve years before.

Late on Friday night, the 30th of April, negotiations for peace in the coalfields broke down. The Government, the miners, and the mine-owners bowed to one another, and to this man and that, and went their separate ways. The Government went back into conclave. The miners went back to the Trades Union Conference, where Mr. J. H. Thomas told the delegates of all affiliated Unions that "they would shortly be called upon to make the most momentous decision that any body of Trade Unionists had ever been called upon to make." The mine-owners went back to their offices and issued their lock-out notices to come into force at midnight that night—it was like an echo of the midnight ultimatum of August 4, 1914.

Next morning was May Morning; and every colliery in Britain was silent. All the other industries were working, but only till such time as the order came for them to be silent too. And in his Thamesmouth home, Tony, sitting at his breakfast table, read with a quivering appreciation that the Navy was engaging in secret movements, its ratings held ready for use in an emergency, and special trains standing still in its dockyards. Not far from him, in Thamesmouth Town Hall, Alderman Scrase, Mayor of Thamesmouth, sat reading the circular letter of the Ministry of Transport, which detailed the arrangements made throughout the country for the maintenance of the essential services of food, fuel, water and light, "should the area of the dispute be so widened as to cause a stoppage in other industries."

May Day. Perhaps sentiment and superstition were not lacking in the men's leaders that they published on such a day their decision to call the General Strike. "The General Council of the Trades Union Congress," they proclaimed, "directs as follows: that the following trades and undertakings shall cease work as and when required by the General Council: railways, sea transport, docks, road transport, repair shops, printing trades, iron and steel, building, electricity and gas." The Government issued a Proclamation by the King. "George R.I. Whereas by the Emergency Powers Act, 1920, it is enacted that if it appears to Us that any action has been taken by any body of persons of such a nature and on so extensive a scale as to be calculated to deprive the community of the essentials of life, We may, by Proclamation, declare that

a state of emergency exists: Now, therefore, We do, by and with the advice of Our Privy Council, hereby declare that a state of emergency exists."

Each document veiled the truth, since it was best to believe that we were all good Britons together; but the commanders behind these two shots knew that they were war and the acceptance of war; with blockade the weapon of one side, and the running of the blockade its answer. God send that these would be the only weapons. The Trades Union Council published a request to its million strikers "to remain quiet and orderly." The Government sent troops into South Wales, Lancashire and Scotland "to assist the police in the maintenance of order and the protection of life and property." And the wires from the continents buzzed with the news that the world was filling up the benches around our island circus, to sit there at ease and study the tourney. It gave us a grim pride in our notoriety.

At midnight on the third of May it began. The last hope of a settlement had died some hours before, when in the great newspaper works the operative printers, machine-minders, stereotypers, warehousemen and packers refused to handle the papers unless anti-strike matter were deleted; and on the editors rejecting this demand with contumely, five journals ceased publication. At that the Prime Minister, with a sigh for lost peace and the end of goodwill, broke off all negotiations with everybody; and the strike began. All leave was stopped in the Army and Navy. The Commissioner of Police called up all Special Constables to report for duty; and many good men, delighted at their sudden importance, donned blue uniforms, peaked caps and armlets, and hurried to their stations with the blessing of their wives. The trains finished their journeys and stopped still. The trams and buses plied over their last route and went into their depots for a long sleep. The men came out of the gates. And next morning Hyde Park did not open to the public, but only to soldiers and to the drivers of lorries clanking with milk-churns; for it was the Milk Pool of London.

In Thamesmouth Tony was out in the streets before his breakfast coffee had cooled in the jug. The streets presented

the same excitement as on the first day of the Railway Strike some years before, only with an atmosphere more highly charged. So much more highly charged that he wondered why he had been excited about that mild little affair of the railways. That was a strike ; this might well be a revolution and a new England. Once again it seemed as if West Thamesmouth was streaming along the roadway in private cars, in lorries, in charabancs, on bicycles and on foot ; while East Thamesmouth, having downed tools, stood on the pavement with its hands in its pockets, and cheered. There could be no question that, at present, the dominant mood of everybody was, not anger, but fun. The pavement gave the roadway its satirical cheers or its laughing boos. And the roadway brandished hands in acknowledgment. Pedestrians hailed cars, no matter how packed they were and no matter how rickety, and the cars stopped and picked them up with a "Come on, then ! We can but bust." Some facetious cars bore such placards as "Welcome all," or "Get in, and be damned to you." A bright girl came into the streets provided with a large bill for an apron, "Please take me." She was immediately taken. A magnificent Rolls-Royce tourer enjoyed a personal triumph as it hummed along the High Street loaded with milk-churns. And some motor-cyclists, coming the opposite direction, from London, raised a quick interest and a cheer, for they raced like dispatch riders in time of war, with a label on their handle-bars, "T.U.C."

As before, Tony walked to the station to enjoy that silence which stretched from its gates to the furthest distances of its permanent way. Near the station was an ironmonger's shop ; and while Tony paused at its door, its proprietor, anxious to be delivered of much gossip on a day like this, came out for a chat ; and lo ! it was Will Warner, the plump and merry man who had quarrelled so pleasantly with Joe Wylie in the tap-room of the "Running Horses."

"Of all the goddam fools," he said, "I am the goddamnedest."

"Why ?" asked Tony.

Will shook his head humorously—sorrowfully ; and though his hands were in his pockets, he rattled no money there.

"Yes, I am my own boss now ; and I'm damned if I deserve to be."

"But why ?"

"Because I didn't buy up all the oil stoves I could lay me

hands on, and all the camp-beds and all the wireless sets. Then I'd have made my fortune. Here it is, nine o'clock in the morning, and I've sold every oil stove, cookin' and heatin', that I've got in the place. And I must a bin rung up for twenty more. And now they're beginning to inquire if I stock camp-beds."

"What do they want camp-beds for?"

"The gentlemen want them to sleep in overnight at their offices. Here I've had days and weeks to see this coming, and I never so much as thought that camp-beds would be a good line. What do you think of that?"

"I'm sure I shouldn't have foreseen it," said Tony.

"No, but then such things isn't in your line. I should have set down and thought, 'Now here's a strike coming, with no coal, no gas, no trains, no newspapers, no nothing. What'll everybody be bleating for? Let me get it all in straight-away.' But did I think of anything? Nothing at all. There's nothing extra in my shop that wasn't there a week ago. And if you don't call that a mutt's incompetence, I don't know what is. We shan't get a strike like this again."

Tony suggested that one could always hope.

"Yes, but they'll all be up to it next time," said Will. "Now wireless. Why didn't I say, 'No newspapers; that'll mean a boom in wireless—with everyone crazy for news, like they are. I'll fix up me agency rightaway.' The young fellow at the electricity shop says that he'd sold every set he'd got, before he'd been open ten minutes this morning, and now he's ringing up half England for more, but they're all sold everywhere, or wanted—even if they could get 'em down to him. Why, I haven't even got a set of me own, not having believed in wireless much, so far. I'm a mutt, I am."

Tony tried to remove the barbs from Will Warner's scourge, but the plump ironmonger preferred to flog himself heartily. He wept for his profits which were not; and refused to be comforted.

"There's bicycles too. I might have seen that there'd be a big trade in bicycles. But there! if you haven't got the foresight of a beetle, you must pay for it. I tell you: I feel humiliated. Call me a business man! Am I? *Thump!* I'm going in for gardening."

Their attention was drawn from the shop and its lost possibilities by the passing of some small boys who ran across the road and up a side street, screaming "The Tahn'Awl! The

Tahn'Awl." Older people hurried after them, no less interested, but much more dignified.

"Where are they going?" asked Tony.

"To the Town Hall," said Will.

"What's going to happen there?"

"Pfaw! nothing'll happen. The strikers are going to march past, just by way of saying How-d'ye-do to the Mayor and the Chief Constable; and then they'll march back where they came from."

"Which strikers? There are so many of them."

"The Transport blokes. The railwaymen and tramway-men and busmen. They've heard that the Mayor's said as how he'll have the corporation trams out of the depot if he has to drive the first of them himself. And they don't intend to let 'im; that's all. So they're marching past in power, and giving him this friendly nod. Least, that's what I've heard. They're forming up on the Recreation Ground now."

"But how does the Mayor propose to run the trams with no skilled drivers?"

"With volunteers, whom he'll train. He's in the Town Hall enrolling 'em now; and I think I shall enrol meself. I should be better at running a tram than running a shop."

"I shouldn't mind driving a tram," said Tony: and after bidding good-bye and good business to Will Warner, he walked towards the Town Hall, hardly less excited than the smallest of the street urchins. The only entertainment he saw in front of the Town Hall was a parade of policemen stretching the whole width of its railings; but this was a fine spectacle and rewarded his coming. A mounted sergeant and a mounted inspector walked their horses up and down in front of the parade. On the opposite pavement a considerable crowd of civilians stood and gaped at the Town Hall, its yard, its railings and its line of policemen; while the urchins hopped and shouted in the gutter below.

"The tramwaymen are going to march past," volunteered a man standing next to Tony; for everyone was anxious to gossip with everyone else to-day.

"Yes," replied Tony; "but nothing will happen."

"I don't know," mused the man. "Old Scrase is a tough old cuss; and if it don't happen to-day, it'll happen to-morrow. He'll have those trams out, even if there's bloodshed."

"Where's he now?"

"Up there somewhere, with the Tramways Committee." The man nodded towards the windows of the Town Hall. "Thinking he's God Aw'mighty and equal to anything. And here come the boys."

A band was approaching from far down the street; and everyone in the watching crowd informed his neighbour of this fact, which was quite unnecessary. Then all of them quieted to await events. The line of constables looked straight in front of them, as if they heard no music; and the mounted officers continued to parade up and down before them. The many windows of the Town Hall looked over their heads, empty and unregarding. Tony looked up at those windows, half hoping that the face of Alderman Scrase would appear behind a pane. But it did not. No, one might have guessed that the old gentleman would not deign to observe any movement of the strikers. He would be feeling very much like an old French aristocrat when the *sans-culottes* came threatening his *château*. He would be engaged with his staff, preparing the battle. And without knowing it, and fully believing that he was sad and solemn indeed this morning, he would be enjoying himself quite as much as the smallest of the urchins hopping in the gutter.

The band was now level with Tony's eyes; it went by with a blare of brass, and the long column of strikers passed. There must have been five hundred of them; and they marched in good order, four abreast, and shepherded by mounted policemen. Many were wearing their trade union badges; some had red rosettes, and nearly all displayed their war medals, beautifully polished that morning. They might have been the old 15th Royal West Essex marching in mufti. In the last file of all, among those who could only have been sympathizers, he saw Joe Wylie limping along on his brackety legs, with his bowler hat pushed back on his hair, his medals arrayed and shining on his breast, and assuredly the largest rosette of the muster blooming in his buttonhole.

The next day, Tony, a-fidget for adventure, took his car through the early morning to London, that he might pick up and help on their way some of the thousands of working girls who were being compelled to trudge from their homes to the

City. For old times' sake he set his course for Kensington; and, once in Kensington High Street, he saw that he could hardly have chosen a better district for the plying of his amateur taxi. The pavements of that great artery into London were two black rivers of men and girls flowing eastward on weary feet to the City. He had seen nothing like it since he watched the great retreat of the French civilians before the drive of the enemy in March, 1918. It was as if a nation moved one way. None of the red buses were in the roadway between the streaming pedestrians, but the private cars, lorries, charabancs, carts, motor-cycles, and pedal cycles bowled along, all loaded to breaking strain with laughing and cheering passengers. The laughter was mostly in the vehicles, the trampers on the pavement being too footsore and weary to laugh. Some of these vehicles bore improvised labels proclaiming their destination, so that pedestrians desiring a lift might know which of them to hail. Tony's empty tourer, labelled "Any Old Where," was immediately hailed; and he crowded eight girls on to its seat, its floor and its hood, and felt its springs protesting as he turned it into the eastward flow. He passed Hyde Park, with its closed gates and policemen at sentry-stations before them, and, glancing through the railings, saw the milk churns assembled in battalions on the grass, the lorries parked in columns along the roadways, and the telephone men climbing the trunks to festoon their wires from branch to branch. One by one he dropped his girls at points from Piccadilly to Cannon Street, picking up others as the seats became free. One of the girls offered him a sixpenny tip, which he declined with unoffended laughter; and another offered him a kiss, which he did not decline.

During the body of the day he drove his car in the East-end and Dockland, not without a hope of witnessing some scenes a little less peaceful than those in the West and the City. Alarmists told him that he was a fool to venture into these parts with his blackleg car, as the dockers were in ugly temper and had already smashed up cars unprotected by the letters, "T.U.C." But nothing in the grey streets justified this tale; they were merely the streets of East Thamesmouth over again, only more squalid and more thickly populated. Idle men stood everywhere; slatternly women gossiped shrilly at their doors; and barefoot children, infected by the excitement in the air, ran screaming about their play. A silence, as of

Sunday, possessed the workshops, warehouses, factories and dockyards; while a liveliness, as of Bank Holiday, filled the people's homes and overflowed on to pavement, yard and alley. At every strike head-quarters which he passed he saw bills displayed in the windows: "Keep calm. Keep cool. Don't congregate." On plots of waste land he saw football in progress, or stump cricket; for it was May, and between the seasons. In one street he saw a coster's family setting out in a cart for a day in the fields. The only warlike thrill that slumland gave him was a march-past of the Guards on their way to the docks, with their band at their head playing "Pack up your troubles in your old kit-bag and smile, smile, smile."

Thursday, the third day of the strike, there was interest enough in the Thamesmouth streets to hold him there. The air was full of rumours that the Mayor would bring out the trams to-day, himself at the controlling handle of the first. All idle feet were hurrying into Capital Road, where the red wall and closed gates of the Tramway Depot faced the Recreation Ground. Here, for a quarter of a mile north and south of the depot's gates, the pavements and roadway were thronged with talkative people, whom police, on foot or on horseback, were "moving on."

"Move on, there! Keep moving, please. There's nothing going to happen to-day."

Some of the wags in the crowd called out their old army cries, "Get a move on now. . . . Lift your feet up. . . . Break step. . . ." But others of the men only "moved on" sullenly, their fists asleep in their pockets. Policemen patrolled before the red wall of the depot, and a noise of hammering came from the yard and the sheds behind.

Walking back, since nothing seemed likely to break the peace of Capital Road, Tony was surprised to see paper-boys running down the High Street, shouting "Message from Prime Minister." There had been no newspapers in Thamesmouth for the last two days, except a *Daily Telegraph* reduced to two quarto pages, and an *Evening News* typewritten on a single sheet of foolscap; which two astonishing publications had induced the wits to assert that their next issues would appear in manuscript, and on toilet paper. Tony stopped a boy and bought two journals, neither of which he had ever seen before. One was *The British Gazette*, and the other *The British Worker*. He quickly scanned them—oh, yes, he had heard

something about this : *The British Gazette* was the new Government organ, produced at the offices of *The Morning Post*, whose presses were still working ; and *The British Worker* was the answer of the Trades Union Congress, published at the offices of *The Daily Herald*, which could still command its men. Amateur strike-breakers were conveying the Government paper all over the country in their private cars ; and the vehicles labelled " T.U.C. " were systematically distributing the Trade Union sheet to every strike centre.

The two papers were like the General Routine Orders of army days.

Standing on the kerb, Tony read the Prime Minister's message in *The British Gazette* : " Constitutional Government is being attacked. Let all good citizens whose livelihood and labour have thus been put in peril bear with fortitude and patience the hardships with which they have been so suddenly confronted. Stand behind the Government, who are doing their part, confident that you will co-operate in the measures they have undertaken to preserve the liberties and privileges of the people of these islands. The laws are in your keeping. You have made Parliament their guardian. The General Strike is a challenge to Parliament, and the road to anarchy and ruin." He read also that, in their match against Warwickshire, Lancashire had scored 179, and 180 for six wickets, declared ; Watson making 60, not out, and Quaife taking 4 for 13.

In *The British Worker* he read : " Do make everyone understand that this is an industrial, not a political dispute. It concerns Wages, Decent Conditions of labour, and the methods of Negotiation ; not the Constitution, not the House of Commons. Do not decline to love his car in the East-end, everybody smiling ; the way to do that of witnessing some sort of your best to discountenance any idea of the West and of disorderly conduct. Do any odd jobs that want to be done about the house. Do a little to interest and amuse the kiddies now you have the chance. Do what you can to improve your health ; a good walk every day will keep you fit. Do something. Hanging about and swapping rumours is bad for everybody."

After the Tramway Depot the next most interesting building to stare at was the Town Hall—indeed Town Hall and Depot, though half Thamesmouth lay between them, seemed to be partners fronting each other over the roofs in a mutual

determination that the trams should come out. Tony walked to the Town Hall. A fleet of cars stood backed against the kerb, each with its gentleman owner at its wheel, wearing the brassard of a special constable. Some loiterers stood on the opposite pavement and gazed at these cars, which were waiting, as everyone knew, to rush a flying squad of regular constables to any quarter of the town where disorder might threaten. A new notice, pasted on the board of the Town Hall, drew Tony across the road to study it. He read :

COUNTY BOROUGH OF THAMESMOUTH

Men possessing the requisite health, strength and vigour are earnestly requested to join the Special Constabulary and assist the Regular Police in the maintenance of law and order during the present emergency. Special Constables who sustain injury in the execution of their duty, and widows and children in case of death, will be granted pensions, allowances and gratuities.

Candidates may present themselves for enrolment at the Central Police Station, Town Hall, Thamesmouth.

JAMES HITCHCOCK,

Chief Constable.

Chief Constable's Office, Town Hall, Thamesmouth. 6th May, 1926.

Tony was just reading this a second time when he saw Mr. Broadley descending the steps of the Town Hall. He went to meet him at the gates.

"I am going on strike, Vicar. In other words, I am going to leave your employ for a little while and become a Special Constable."

"Quite right ; quite right," agreed the Vicar enthusiastically. "I think you're perfectly right. We must all do something at a time like this. Yes, you do it, my boy ; I feel it will be a great satisfaction to our people. I've just been in there, seeing Scrase myself and asking what I and the Church can do. There's a great responsibility on us at this time. I feel that, as Mayor's Chaplain, I ought to—to do something. I'm starting daily Intercession Services at once, but don't you worry about them, my boy ; I'll take them if you are kept by your duties. I wish I had something else I could do."

"I'll tell you something else you can do, Vicar."

"What's that ?"

"Drive the second tram, when they all come out of the depot. If the Mayor drives the first, and the Mayor's Chaplain the second, in cassock and bands, it'll be really picturesque."

"I wouldn't mind doing it at all," said Mr. Broadley, "if it would do any good. In fact, I think it's an idea—without the cassock, of course—ha, ha! It would be a gesture—a gesture to the men. Do you think it would do any good?"

"I think it would do much more good to pray at the Intercession Services that he *doesn't* bring them out. Pray that he's visited by a slight indisposition and confined to his bed for a week."

"But why? I think he's perfectly right, I *must* say."

"He may be right, but he's damned unwise. Surely his business as Chief Magistrate is to do all that he can to preserve order, not to go out of his way to provoke a conflict."

"Well, I don't know. . . ." Mr. Broadley had become a little chary of arguing with his curate ever since the world had paid such tribute to "Sanders" and the other books. Without admitting it to himself, he was afraid of O'Grogan and accepted his genial ascendancy. "Anyhow, he's determined to have them out. He can talk about little else. He says it is a necessary gesture."

"I know. And that's why I think we'd better all become policemen. I'm going to enrol now."

"Quite right. Splendid. It's your duty, I'm sure of it."

"Is it? I don't know. To be perfectly frank, Vicar"—somehow Mr. Broadley always affected Tony with an itch to speak the laughing truth, as if he had sipped a drop of Sanders' wine—"I don't think I'm doing this in an appetite for duty, but in an appetite for excitement. Which is more than half true of the Mayor and Corporation as well, if they only knew it. Well, let's within, and learn our task."

Thereupon he left the Vicar, entered the Town Hall and presented himself in a Committee Room for enrolment. The enrolling officer gave him a truncheon, an armlet and a warrant, and instructed him to go home and wait there till he received his summons to duty.

"Yessir!" answered Tony, assuming at once the briskness of the army. He almost clicked his heels before turning about.

"Oh, and wait a minute," called the officer. "When you go on duty, keep the truncheon in your pocket, out of sight."

"I see, sir. Thank you."

"Yes; we don't want to be provocative. Good morning."

At home, after he had arrested Honor on the authority of

his warrant, and demanded of Paston, the servant, why the devil he wasn't on strike like all other good men, he went into his study and sat there, announcing dramatically that he mustn't leave his chair till he had received the summons to duty and to danger.

It came by the evening post in a gratifying envelope, stamped "On Police Service" :

" Dear Sir,

" *You will please report for duty at the Town Hall, Thames-mouth, at 10 a.m. to-morrow, and at the same hour each succeeding day, until further instructed. You will remain on duty for four hours. Uniform (if any) and equipment will be worn.*

" *Yours faithfully,*

" *N. Davis Gunther,*

" *Chief Inspector, 'A' Division.*"

CHAPTER IV

THE AFFRAY IN CAPITAL ROAD

ON reporting at the Town Hall next morning, he was told to wait in "that room over there."

"You'll find a lot of other specials there. Barney, show this gentleman the Recreation Room."

A boy scout led him across the marble floor of this first landing; and their footsteps echoed in the roof above the well of the staircase. The boy scout pushed open one of two high double-doors; and Tony, passing through, exchanged the cold emptiness of the passages and galleries for an atmosphere blue with smoke, hot with breath, and noisy with men's voices. Sixty or seventy "specials" were waiting here. They lolled in the window-seats with newspapers and magazines, or stood about in talkative groups, or sat at card tables with draughts and dominoes and chess. Nearly all were in the browns and greys of mufti, with nothing to show the power that invested them except the striped brassards on their left arms and the truncheons which peeped from their pockets. A few, and these seemed very old men, were in the long blue overcoats and peaked blue caps of their war-time service. Tired and gentle old tradesmen they seemed, who could have been useful for little, even so many years ago, except to wait for the throb of enemy aircraft overhead and then warn the householders to take to their cellars. A majority of the new, un-uniformed volunteers were middle-aged men, already grey: gentlemen of substance and leisure from the homes of West Thamesmouth. Some of them, however, were slim young dandies: probably the children of the same houses. One or two, in shabby clothes and mufflers, may have been recruits from the unemployed.

Tony, entering and sitting on the edge of a table received a distinct impression as of old halberdiers dicing and smoking

on the battle eve, and all unaware that an enchanter had changed their fashion into the fashion of men ten centuries hence.

A quiet grey-haired man shared the table's edge with him and soon opened a conversation. He was a retired colonel, it appeared: and he pleased Tony much, for, though he disliked the strike, he had no hot-headed vindictiveness against the strikers.

"I am with the miners all the way," said he, "but this general strike is a blunder."

"Absolutely," agreed Tony. "Absolutely."

"And their leaders know it," continued the Colonel. "You can read between the lines of their speeches and their writings that they know they've let loose too much. MacDonald knows it; Jim Thomas knows it; they all know it, except A. J. Cook. And, frankly, I'm sorry for it. It'll do the miners no good; and their case was excellent; and it'll hit the Trade Union movement a blow from which it won't recover for years."

"Absolutely," said Tony.

"Aren't you at the Parish Church?" asked the Colonel suddenly.

"Yes."

"Antony O'Grogan, isn't it?"

"Yes."

"I thought so. I've read your books."

Tony was more than ever pleased with the Colonel.

Their conversation was broken by the entrance of the Chief Inspector, who formed them in two rows, picked out a slender young man of military carriage, who was a guardee subaltern on leave, and placed him in command of the whole detachment.

"Lick 'em into some sort of shape," he said; and went out.

The young subaltern was both lively and bashful: he reminded Tony almost painfully of Childe Harold and young Carder.

"Look here," he informed his parade, blushing to his fair hair and clearing his throat, "he's told me to put you through some drill. Sorry, and all that. Can't think why he chose me when there are such a lot of you who are much older, and all that, but—oh damn! you see what I mean. Number off!"

Tony, standing in the front rank next the Colonel, shouted "Twelve!" after the Colonel's "Eleven!" and, when the company was put through some elementary drill—forming fours, re-forming two-deep, moving to the right in

column of fours—he remarked, out of the side of his eye, the crispness with which the Colonel moved. A like soldierly smartness in most of the grey-haired men made him wonder how many colonels, majors, and admirals, perchance, the subaltern was forming into fours. They seemed to rejoice in putting themselves under the command of a boy, if their country demanded it. And, unknown to themselves, they were as happy as boys in this make-believe game of being privates.

“That’ll do,” shouted the subaltern. “Not bad. Some of you have done this before—what? That old war, I guess. Well, we shall march to the Drill Hall to do some pukka drill later on—what? All damn silly, I dare say; because nothing’ll happen, probably; but you never know: we may have to charge like one o’clock and clean up the town. I rather hope so, myself—not that we’re to be provocative, as the Chief says—but—oh damn! you see what I mean: I shouldn’t like all you gentlemen to have come here for nothing. . . . Righto, men. Dismiss.”

They dismissed and returned to their tables or their talkative groups. Tony found himself in a cluster of hot-heads whose note was very different from the Colonel’s, or, indeed, from that of the majority, who, if less liberal than he, were men of quietness and restraint. These were loud young men, fleshy in person and flashy in dress; and it was nothing but Tony’s combativeness which had driven him to join their argument.

“The trouble’ll begin when the trams come out,” said one of them, a fatuous youth with a surly moon face.

“Yes; and may it be soon!” suggested another.

“And may I be there!” shouted a hefty young bully with black hair oiled and curled and a suit of plus-fours peculiarly offensive. He was of the type that must always shout down everyone else. “I want to get my knock at the blighters, and the sooner the better. I said to the Chief when I enlisted, I said, ‘I hope you’ll send me somewhere where there’s trouble.’ I’m in the mood to see red.”

“Same here,” grumbled another. “A few cracks on the nut’ll teach ’em whether their Emperor Cook is going to boss this country or not.”

“Cook? *Cook?*” scoffed the bully, “I’d string him up to a yard-arm, if I had my way. What we want is a Gen’ral Dyer, who wouldn’t be afraid to get ’em in a crowd and open

fire with his machine-guns on 'em. That'd put enough of the fear of God into 'em to last 'em a year or two. But they know we're too soft."

"And thank God for that," said Tony quietly.

"Eh?" The speaker turned on him. "What? Thank God for what?"

"That we're as soft as you say," repeated Tony, his brow heating. "Only I should substitute 'civilized' for 'soft.' Thank God we're not at all losing our heads like you."

The man seemed bewildered that anyone should be holding a different view from his; and his lips stammered before he could reply. Tony was turning away, but a bully no more likes to lose a victim than a cat likes to lose a mouse; and the stammerer, touching the lapel of Tony's coat, jerked out: "Well, what the hell have you joined up to fight 'em for?"

"Fight them? I don't know what you're talking about. I've joined this crowd to assist in the preservation of justice, not to fight anybody."

"Well, then, I have!" said the stutterer.

"So I gather. . . ."

This was a palpable sneer; and the face of the bully crimsoned. He thrust his head forward and held under Tony's eyes the buttonhole of his jacket, in which was a little medallion engraved "B.F." "See that? Well, I'm one of the British Fascisti, and I don't care who knows it. And we're reckoning that this bloody strike'll just about double our numbers; and before your Emperor Cook takes command we'll see what a little of the Mussolini touch can do. Yes . . . just you make sure of that."

Tony stared down at the badge, unblinking. "B.F.," he said. "That might stand for anything."

"*What's* that?" A laugh at his expense had turned the bully into a bull. He lowered his head further and brought it closer to Tony's face, as if he would butt his brows with it. "You call me a fool, do you? You as good as call me a Bloody Fool?"

"I did not," said Tony. "But I think it unwise to go about labelled like that."

The fist of the bully swung for a blow, but Tony caught him by the wrist and quite easily forced his hand downward. Tony's muscles were powerful compared with those in the flabby arm of his attacker. "I call you a fool now," he said,

still holding the wrist and letting the man feel the strength of his grip, "since you can't argue without coming to blows. And don't think everybody's overawed by your shouting, because they're not!" He flung the wrist away from him, as something that interested the company no further.

"Come away, Charlie," advised one of his friends. "Don't you know who you're talking to? He's one of the ministers at St. Wilfrid's."

"He? Him a minister?" exclaimed Charlie. "Hur—no wonder he's so soft then. A minister, is he?"

"*And a very famous author,*" offered the Colonel, who had joined the group standing round.

"What do I care what he is?" sneered Charlie. But he obviously did care. Like all bullies he was alarmed to think he had attacked somebody who might prove to be of account.

"*And an ex-middle-weight champion of Oxford,*" added the Colonel, in a wise effort of the imagination.

"What do I care what he is?" repeated Charlie.

"Yes, that's why they asked him to join the Special Constables," the Colonel explained further.

"What do I care what he is? He didn't join 'em to come it over me——"

"Fall in! Fall in, men," called the voice of the young commander. "We're going to march to the Drill Hall."

Charlie drifted off with his friends, and Tony heard him mutter: "Well, that's saved him a thick ear, I reckon. The fellow's sammy."

They marched through the streets to the Drill Hall of the old Fifteenth. And as they formed fours, and left-turned, and left-wheeled, and marched with swinging arms round and round its asphalt floor, the girdered roof echoing the tramp of their feet and the commands of their captain, Tony imagined the parade of twelve years ago, when the men who were to be *his* men assembled here; and the voice of Kit Scrase called under this roof to the lads of C Company, and the voice of Colonel Tappiter yelled to the battalion to march; and with a shouting of subalterns and a tramping of feet the battalion, a thousand strong, marched away—marched to camp and to ship-board and to Mudros, till they met *him*, many months later, on the bluffs of Gallipoli. Most of that thousand were under the soil of Gallipoli or Sinai or France now; or, if they were still alive, were in the ranks of the strikers, arrayed against

him and his class. . . . No, it didn't fit somehow; the picture wasn't right; it was a distorted picture of their feelings for one another.

He did his first piece of real police duty the next morning. The Inspector, coming into the Recreation Room, detailed him to attach himself to a young regular constable and go to the depot of the Estuary Omnibus Company, where they were to stand on guard over the main gates. He found the regular in the passage, a huge round-cheeked Essex ploughboy; and together they walked off to the closed gates in Norton Road, and stood side by side before them. The regular, some twenty years old, was clad in his neat, standardized uniform of blue, with broad black army boots for his base; the special, nearing forty, was clad in an exceedingly well-cut suit of grey, with precise brown shoes on his feet. And the regular was the master, the special the man. The regular did not speak much, but stared vacantly in front of him, and, if questioned by his assistant, replied only "Yes, sir," and "No, sir." The special, abandoning conversation, stared at the traffic in the road.

This traffic was a panorama of excitement. It was good to see a Government provision lorry go rattling by, with an amateur youth at the wheel and a policeman at his side. It was good to see another provision lorry go by, with an amateur woman at the wheel and a grinning policeman guarding this delicate charge. It was good to watch the passing of a blackleg omnibus, crowded inside and out, with a policeman by the driver's seat and a policeman on the conductor's platform. It was better still when a second omnibus passed with its windows smashed. There was a thrill in the passing of a doctor's car which bore on its wind-screen a label with a red cross and the words "Doctor's Car." And best of all was when the Flying Squad rushed past in answer to an S O S from somewhere. With intermittent hooting and a steady roar, car after car tore by, each laden with policemen, on seats, on hood, and on footboard. One of these police cars was driven by a girl. Hard behind this pageant, and walking with a very quick step, went Mrs. Joe Wylie, her golden hair taking the wind with beauty, and her face strained with anxiety lest she were too late to see the fun. Tony laughed. It would be a dinner from the shop for Joe Wylie this morning.

But perhaps Joe took no dinner in these stirring days. It

was certainly just about dinner-time when Tony saw him, complete with medals and red rosette, hastening along to his duties. Tony called after him, and immediately doubted whether this hearty greeting was permissible in a policeman on duty. Joe stopped, recognized him, and came up.

"Gaw, sir! I never thought to see you in arms against us."

"I'm not in arms against you, Joe. I'm keeping you in order, that's all."

"*And* you'll be wanted, sir," Joe affirmed triumphantly. "You only wait till the Mayor brings out his trams! *That's* when the fair'll begin—yes, sir, rahnd-abahts, swings and all! *And* the coco-nut shies, you bet. I only hope, sir"—Joe's hand covered his moustache, for a jest was emerging—"that *your* head isn't one of the coco-nuts."

"Why, what's going to happen when the trams come out?"

"I shouldn't like to say, sir. But all the boys are standing by for that, and for nothing else. If the Mayor makes his gesture, they're going to make theirs. There's gestures and gestures, you see. I wouldn't say as I shouldn't heave a brickbat or two meself."

The young regular stared in front of him, as if he heard and saw nothing.

"Better be careful what you're saying, Joe; or my friend here will arrest you."

"'Im? 'Im?" Joe turned to the constable and addressed him. "Yuss: you're a fine fellow, you are! Takin' the pay of the capittalists, and fighting for them against your own class! Ain't that what you're doing?"

"I dessay you're about right, mate," answered the young constable, rather to Tony's dismay.

"You agree, do you?"

"Sometimes I think like that."

"Well, then! *Well*, then! Why don't you come out and join us, and bring your pals too? There's quite a lot of coppers that thinks the same, ain't there?"

"I dessay there's a few, chum."

"*Well*"—Joe appealed to him, as to his manhood—"why don't you get together and do something about it?"

"It's not too easy, chum."

"Gammon! You can but lose your job, and *we'll* see that

no one's victimized after this—you can bet your boots on that. We'll see that all them as has suffered for the Cause ain't out of a job. It's worth thinking about, ain't it?"

"Yes. . . . I expect you're about right, mate."

"Hell, Joe!" Tony burst into this duologue. "I suppose you know you're committing a considerable crime—'inciting to mutiny'—or whatever they call it. In Germany you'd have had the bracelets on your wrists for half of what you've said. Disaffecting His Majesty's Forces like that! Leave it alone, and tell us one of your funny stories instead. You'll feel better then."

Tony's invitation was not one that Joe could have resisted. "Well, sir, did I ever tell you this one?" His hand showed a tendency to rise towards his moustache. "There's a cove of an engine-driver, who's bin taking his train up to London every morning—he's a dirty scab, of course, but we'll let that pass—and when he gets into Fenchurch Street, he stands by his engine with his cap in his hand, and all the gents, being that grateful to him, pour in their bank-notes, and gold tie-pins and God-knows-what-all; and now, sir, he's got enough to retire on; and he's going to buy an engine for himself, and set up on his own."

Tony threw back his head and laughed; and even the young regular grinned. Joe's eyes twinkled.

"Yes, he's going to set up on his own! And did I ever tell you this one, sir; it's the best that's going the rounds? There was one of those amatewer drivers, a young stoddent from Oxford, and he brought up the Scotch express from Edinburgh to Euston in record time. And all the Directors, and General Managers, and Station Masters come out on to the platform to shake his hand and congratulate him; but he said, 'Down't you congratulate me, for Christ's sake! It wasn't till I was a mile from Euston that I discovered how to stop the bloody thing.'"

This story was a great success with the police; and Joe, such was his inveterate habit, immediately repeated its point. "Yuss: 'Down't congratulate me,' he says. 'It wasn't till I was a mile from Euston that I discovered how to stop the bloody thing.' . . . Well that's enough lies for this morning, sir. I must be awf."

With a cheerful good-bye, he left them and hurried away on his stocky legs, to find more of the day's entertainment.

The young regular making no comment, Tony was moved to ask :

"Then you are in sympathy with the strike?"

"No, sir. I don't think so, sir."

"But you said you agreed with him?"

"Oh, we always agree with them. We're told to; it saves a row."

Tony contemplated this remarkable statement; and the constable added in an afterthought :

"Of course if there was a crowd listening we'd have to do something about it."

When their period of duty was over they returned to the Police Station in the Town Hall, and the special went upstairs to the Recreation Room. The long room was empty, and he sat himself in a window-seat with a newspaper that he had picked up. It was a copy of the *Continental Daily Mail*, which could still circulate in England, because it was printed in Paris and brought over by aeroplane. What news of the strike in the world beyond Thamesmouth? The lead story told him: "Organization is steadily overcoming confusion. The daily life of Great Britain is being kept going by the good temper, common sense and remarkable resourcefulness of the public. There were one or two cases of rowdyism directed against the omnibuses in outlying London suburbs, but no serious troubles are reported from anywhere." The next column gave him the comments of a New York journal. "Great Britain is facing to-day the stark fact of an attack on her organized life. The Government must use all its resources to win the fight, even though this means employing the Army and Navy and opening fire on the mob."

Thamesmouth filled its streets next morning, because rumour was in the air. Every man was telling every other man, whether friend or stranger, that "the trams were coming out to-day." The rumour was started, perhaps, or it was strengthened, by the sight of a Red Cross Aid Post, with four nurses, established in one of the tramway shelters, not two hundred yards from the depot. All the bolder loafers and merrier larrikins hastened to the stretch of Capital Road between the depot and the Recreation Ground, and dawdled there, so as to be in the

front seats when that majestic performance opened, The Exit of the Trams. Probably some of them hoped to obtain small parts in the performance, as supers in the crowd or, at the least, as "noises off." Less enthusiastic people, who preferred the alarmist complexion, declared that they would not stay in the neighbourhood of the depot for twenty pounds; and they lined themselves instead along the pavements at the lower reaches of Capital Road where it curved away from the depot and ran to meet the sea. Other persons who were really timid, asserted that it would be best to give the whole district as wide a berth as possible, since the police would arrest at sight, if one didn't "move on," and it would soon be impossible to "move on" because of the crowds jamming in Capital Road.

In the Recreation Room the specials, though honoured with no more information than the throngs outside, guessed that *something* was going to happen, because they had been ordered to muster in their strongest force and "stand by" against an emergency call. And they knew that the gentlemen drivers of the Flying Squad cars were "sitting by," with their engines warmed and ready.

They read newspapers and chatted, or played cards and draughts, for an hour; and nothing happened. Tony asked of his friend the Colonel, "Got any idea what's in the wind?"

"Only yarns," replied the Colonel. "But I don't believe we're going to be asked to do anything more serious than escort the volunteers into the depot."

"What volunteers?"

"Those who are to man the trams when, in the fullness of time and the mercy of God, they do come out."

"But why do the volunteers want an escort? What's to stop 'em going in?"

"A few hundred railway men and tramway men, with their hobbledehoy supporters. Peaceful picketing, my boy, five hundred strong. They're determined that no scabs shall enter the depot, and the Mayor is determined that they shall. It's a gesture, my boy; a gesture."

They sat on tables and kicked their heels for a further hour; and then Superintendent Jackson, of "A" Division, entered.

"Fall in along the roadway outside," he called. "Truncheons out of sight, please."

Crowding to the door, they funnelled out. They crossed

the Town Hall yard and passed on to the road. Ah, here was pageantry. A hundred foot police, paraded two deep, stood facing the Town Hall; a score of mounted regulars stood flank to flank beside them, their sleek bay horses tossing their heads; beyond the regulars, flank to flank as they, a score of mounted specials or "auxiliaries"—and the horses of these men varied in height and colour, because their riders were gentlemen from country estates, or grooms from local stables, who had brought their own mounts; beyond these a squad of civilians in their mufti—and these were the volunteers, the men of the moment, the principals to this fine chorus; and beyond the volunteers, last item of all, significant, rather sinister, the Police Ambulance. The Chief Constable, a small figure in neat blue jacket, riding breeches and shining black leggings, paced up and down before his long parade, or halted to exchange a word with his superintendents.

"Here come some more," whispered the Colonel to Tony, who was standing beside him in the front rank of "A" Division.

Tony sent his eye along the unmilitary slant of the Colonel's glance and saw forty or fifty regulars filtering in single file out of a large empty house on the right of the Town Hall. There a force of regulars had been billeted day and night, throughout the whole of this week, so as to be ready for a sudden call. When these men had paraded on the far side of the ambulance van, the Chief Constable said a last word to his superintendents; and the superintendents, leaving him, came to the front of their divisions and spoke.

Superintendent Jackson, standing almost face to face with Tony, shouted: "Listen, men; we are going to march to Capital Road to escort these volunteers into the tramways depot. We have reason to suppose that a crowd of many hundreds of strikers intends to offer some resistance, more or less peaceful, to their entry, and we hope that the sight of such a strong force as this will deter them from any such rash action. Probably there will be no resistance. We hope not. And all special constables kindly understand that on no account are you to strike first, and, if humanly possible, you had best not strike at all. On the other hand, you will immediately arrest any man who assaults you, or interferes with you in the execution of your duty, or whom you see throwing stones or inciting others to riot. If, unfortunately, you are compelled

to make such an arrest you will immediately convey your prisoner into the ambulance van or into the depot, whichever may be the nearer. Thank you. That will do. Right turn."

The Chief Constable, seeing that the superintendents had finished their addresses, walked quickly to the side of the foot police, who were to head the column, gave the column its order to march, and led it himself, on foot. The onlookers who had multiplied on the pavements, immediately made two more processions and, marching along the pavements, accompanied the police with rapid, irregular steps. Small boys, who had never been so happy in their lives, scurried in the gutters and whooped. Heads shot out of windows, and curious sightseers came running down the side streets, in terror lest they should be late. One hurrying man, pestered by a squalling child for information and a view, hoisted her on to his shoulder, where she rode, perfectly placid, with a finger in her mouth and her eyes on the marching men.

"Damn! They might have given us a drum and fife band," whispered the Colonel. "We shan't get a half big enough crowd this way. And a few pipers wouldn't have come amiss."

Cheered by many, booed by a few, and gaped at by all, the column marched down the High Street, and, swinging through Wilton Lane, came to the seaward end of Capital Road. Marching up Capital Road, and rounding the curve which hid the depot from view, it saw a dense mass of people packed between the railings of the Recreation Ground and the depot's red wall. They were mostly men and youths, but one could descry a few women, of whom some even carried their babies in shawls. Schoolboys had climbed the railings of the Recreation Ground so as to be able to stare, over the heads of the crowd, at the shut and silent depot. And since the Recreation Ground sloped upward from the road, a second crowd had taken its stand on the higher parts, where it could enjoy a good view and the protection of the railings. Over this crowd, like monkeys over the undergrowth, the urchins hung from the pole of the giant-stride and from the supports of the horizontal bar, or perched themselves precariously on the cross-beam of the swings. Two or three bestrode the parallel bars.

A low roar, not of welcome to the Chief Constable but of information to one another, went up from this multitude as the police turned the bend.

The Chief Constable halted the column. Mounted police would be too dangerous a tool for opening a channel through that crowd, since its members, packed together, would be unable to draw back from the horses' hooves. He consulted with his superintendents. Then he shaped all his foot police, regulars and specials, into a wedge-formation, himself its point, and its base wide enough to stretch from pavement to pavement. The mounted regulars fell behind this wedge, with the volunteers in their centre like prisoners of war. The mounted auxiliaries fell behind the regulars, and acted as flank guards to the ambulance van. The formation was now arrow-shaped, with the wedge for its arrow-head, and the Chief Constable for the sharp point.

"Right."

The Chief was satisfied. With no weapon in his hand, he faced towards the depot, and the formation went forward. It penetrated the fringe of the crowd, punctured its solid circumference, and forged towards its heart. Tony could hear the Chief calling upon the people to disperse and use no violence. The movement was succeeding. The nearest people drew back from the police, and the furthest gave ground, contenting themselves with shouted sneers and abuse. Tony supposed that they would win to the depot through this snarling calm—when, suddenly, far away behind, one of the auxiliaries' horses, unused to police service, reared and brought a hoof down on to the back of an elderly man, throwing him to the ground.

The tinder ignited at that spot, the fire spread, and the riot was ablaze. There was a rush; and Tony had barely apprehended what was happening when he was separated from his fellows and in the midst of a surging crowd of men. He heard voices: "Come on, boys; let 'em have it!" "Go for the dirty specials!" "We can wipe these b——s off the face of the earth." "Yah! Make a meal off 'em!" "Come on, the Reds!" He heard a distant rumour of boos, a sibilance of hisses, and the intermittent screams of women. He saw a fusillade of stones fired from the summits of the Recreation Ground. He heard a clattering behind, like the rattle of a stampede, and, quickly turning his head, saw the horses of the auxiliaries galloping away, as if they had all taken fright and discharged themselves from further police duty. He saw no more, for now the men were striking at his face and tearing

at his clothes. He disobeyed orders, neither arresting anyone nor summoning assistance. He did not even draw his truncheon. He just maintained a smile, protected himself with his arms, and told them not to be damned fools. Only when one man tried to tear off his armlet did he use any considerable force to throw him off. The main mass of the crowd must have surged away from him now, for a mounted regular cantered up and dispersed his assaulters; and for a moment he stood alone. In that moment he was just thinking, "I don't know what use I've been; perhaps I drew the fire of one or two," when he heard angry shouts and screams in the Recreation Ground, and, throwing his glance that way, saw that the auxiliaries had galloped round a side street, attacked it in the rear, and were now cantering among the swings, giant-stride, and parallel bars, while the people scattered before them. Near by he saw two specials dragging an unwilling prisoner to the ambulance van; and, further away, two regulars, better skilled in these affairs, frog-marching their gentleman to the same cell.

And in the furthest distance he saw the Chief Constable's wedge still driving forward to the gates of the depot.

Next minute he was rushing to the aid of his friend the Colonel. He had seen him tripped and thrown to the ground by the crowd molesting him. Other specials rushed up too and were striving to effect some arrests, when the Colonel, scrambling from under the legs of everybody like a Rugby forward from under the scrum, called, "No; let them be. I can't tell which it was; and, anyhow, they were probably shoved from behind. Let them be; I shan't charge anyone." Having said which, he dusted his suit and rearranged his brassard with fingers that trembled a little, for he was not a young man. Tony observed that the Colonel, like himself, had not even drawn his truncheon.

This was the last thing that Tony observed with any intelligence for some time, because, in the midst of its apprehension, a sharp-edged stone hit him on the side of the head, drew blood, and stunned him. He felt someone catch him under the armpits as he swayed; and then he knew that two people were supporting him towards the depot. The road must have been cleared by now, for his feet went over sunlit cobbles to the depot's gates, which opened to admit him. Somebody led him out of the sunlight and under a roof where all seemed

dark. Somebody bade him sit down and rest. The same person (he thought) cleaned the wound with a handkerchief and said, "It's a little more'n a scratch, sir. It'll be looked at properly when we get back to the Tahn 'Awl."

Then the world before his eyes, shaping itself in the haze assumed outline and solidity and brightness, and he saw that he was in one of the sheds which housed the trams. He was sitting on a long platform like a station's; and there, on their rails, one behind another, like a train at standstill in the station, were the trams. There they were: the *casus belli*, the apples of discord. The trams, God bless them! One behind another, they waited; and all their windows were protected by rabbit-run netting; and their drivers' footboards and conductors' footboards were caged with the same. So that's what the hammering had been!

"Pig-headed old fool." He was thinking of Alderman Scrase, and all that it had cost to gratify one old gentleman's obstinacy.

Feeling quite recovered now, he jumped up and told the young constable who had been his nurse that he was going back to the battle. As the gates opened to let him out, he saw the last charge of the mounted men—if such a slow, sweeping-up movement could be called a charge. They were clearing the road of its last stragglers. Two cordons of police, a hundred yards apart, stretched from pavement to pavement; and the red wall of the depot stared at an empty space before it. Those police who were not wanted for the cordons were standing about, waiting to be "fallen in."

And the volunteers, presumably, were within the depot.

The Chief Constable, as neat as when he set out, spoke to the superintendents; and they formed up the parade in column of fours again.

"Left turn!"

With the dapper little Chief at its head, the column marched back to the Town Hall. Quietly, victoriously, it marched home, bringing its ambulance van. This time, however, the van was not at the tail of the marching body, but in its heart, and guarded on all sides like the coach of a king. Seventeen prisoners rode within.

"A fine funeral march for the men inside," muttered Tony to the Colonel.

The Colonel shook a sorrowful head. "Yes, poor blighters!

and I'm quite sure that we've only nabbed the stupidest and the oldest, and those who couldn't scuttle away fast enough. And it's six months for most of 'em, if Scrase is in court. As he will be—he never neglects his duty.”

In front of the Town Hall the police were halted and held in their ranks till the prisoners had been removed from the van to the cells. With much sympathy, Tony watched them brought out: seventeen of them and all handcuffed. The last but one was Joe Wylie. As they led him in, he raised his two handcuffed fists to brush with his knuckles both wings of his moustache. He looked a little dazed.

CHAPTER V

OUTSIDE THE CELLS

ONE iron trellis after another was rolled back on its wheels to allow Tony to go through to the cells. And a harried face he took through with him. The cells were in the basement of the Town Hall ; and this morning, in less than an hour's time, the prisoners taken in yesterday's battle would come up for judgment in the court above, Alderman Scrase, Mayor of Thamesmouth, presiding. Last night Tony had turned in his sleep, thought, and become broad awake. In the name of mischief. . . . To-morrow Joe Wylie would stand in the dock facing Alderman Scrase on the bench. Joe, who knew all about Kit Scrase ; and the Alderman, Kit's father, who knew nothing.

And Alderman Scrase, strong in duty, would certainly administer one of his "exemplary sentences." And Joe : what would Joe do ? Crude old sinner that he was, he had kept faith with Kit during nine years ; though it must have been heavy going for him, who so dearly loved a story. Would he hold the story any longer if Alderman Scrase had his way with him ? He had never been morally taut, and these years of idleness and loafing had relaxed him more ; would his loyalty to Kit stand the strain of the Alderman's whip ? Tony did not think it. Oh damn, what could he do ? He could not go to the father, tell him the story, and beseech him for lenience. No . . . oh no, Kit, no. . . . Could he see Joe and stiffen him for the heroic walk ? Joe had one virtue left—perhaps the only virtue he had ever possessed—his immense good-nature. And with it, there was his immense sentiment for the memories of war. One must stake all on these. But stay ! There was Tib Wylie too. In his one lapse Joe had told her the story. Would she keep quiet when she saw her husband being dragged off to Coleborough Jail. It was very

difficult to believe. Tony tossed in his bed, impatient for the daylight, that he might be out attempting something; he felt much as he had felt that morning when he went out of the farm at Proven behind Poperinghe, with teeth set and every faculty strained towards the saving of his friend. "O Kit, we will not let you down."

And now he stood in a long stone hall, outside the cells. Behind him one of the folding iron trellises had been drawn into place, shutting him in. Opposite him a dark flight of stone stairs led upward to the court rooms above. On his left, between him and the doors of ten cells, another iron trellis stretched its full length, so that the doors behind this grating looked like the orifices through which caged beasts at a zoo retire from the public stare. One cell was empty and its door open; and by the light of its barred window, high in the back wall, he saw a low bed with folded blankets, and the cistern, chain and seat of a water-closet.

This side of the iron screen a police sergeant sat on a solitary chair; a big, handsome, florid fellow, who had undergone that remarkable change which happens to policemen when their helmets come off—his face seemed surprisingly human and his head seemed surprisingly small.

"I have permission to see one of your charges, Sergeant," said Tony.

"Which of 'em, sir?" asked the sergeant, recognizing him, and rising.

"Joe Wylie."

"Oh, that old rogue. Yes, sir." The sergeant moved to roll back the grating.

"Wait a minute, Sergeant. What'll he get?"

"Six months."

"Gosh, no! Six days."

"Six months for a certainty," repeated the sergeant, jingling his keys. "They give that two days ago to those other lads—them that threw stones at the buses."

"Savage!"

"A bit smart, perhaps; but we 'ave to hit out at a time like this."

"O Christ!" Tony's irritation burst up, but he wrapped it in a laugh for the sergeant's sake, who was a pleasant fellow. "Damn and blast! Surely our job is to keep order; not to get jumpy and hit out."

"I don't think we're doing that, sir."

"Not you regulars perhaps; but you should hear some of the specials! And what about the Mayor and his bench of amateur magistrates upstairs?"

"Oh, *them*. Yes, that's right: they're seeing red."

"Yes, when they ought to be umpires seeing fair play. Instead of that, every man of them is picturing himself as staff officer in a strike-breaking army, and a damned energetic one too."

"That's right, sir. The stipendiaries are really better at a time like this. Yes"—he winked, and unconsciously provided Tony with an epigram—"it's these 'ere Justices of the Peace that go out on the war-path."

"What is Joe charged with?"

"Inciting to riot."

"Good lord!" In a nameless exasperation Tony began to walk up and down. "Good God! Just because he called a lout of a policeman a few lewd names and mentioned the Russians."

"It's more than that, sir. He sloshed a policeman on the jaw."

Tony laughed. "Of course he did! To tell the truth, *I've* wanted all my life—just for once—to bonnet a policeman. And to throw a stone through a bus window. This strike was Joe's chance of a lifetime to get rid of a little fun like that."

"Well, now he's got to pay for his fun, sir."

"So he would—a reasonable fine. But six months! Well, let's see the old scamp."

The sergeant rolled back the screen and went to the door of the fourth cell and opened it. "Here, Joe! You can come out and stretch your legs a bit."

Joe emerged, blinking his eyes at the brighter light of the passage. In those eyes he was trying to keep his Cockney impudence alight, but worry and pain had dimmed that pleasant lamp. Evidently he had been lying on his bed, for he shook into place his odd, untidy assortment of clothes, while he artfully unbuttoned his jacket and pulled down his waistcoat, so as to unveil before the eyes of authority the array of medals at his breast.

"Thank you, boss," he said to the sergeant. "I down't mind if I do. Sitting in there's a bit like spending the day in the——" he winked his meaning.

"Here's a gentleman says he knows you."

Joe looked and saw Tony. "Gawd strike me; it's you, sir. Oh, of course: I'd forgotten you was a special. I bin a bit dazed ever since I was took. Fency *you* a copper, sir. Like '*im*.'" He pointed to the sergeant and then laid the finger along his moustache to cover a jest, while his eyes twinkled artfully above it. "Gaw! 'Ow did yer come dahn as low as that?"

The sergeant accepted the pleasantry with good humour, saying only: "*Ere!* You be careful! Your jokes ain't too timely."

"*Wurl!*" Suddenly Joe sloughed all humour and flared into vindictiveness. "It's a ruddy fine joke you're 'avin' with me, ain't it? What the hell 'ave I done more'n anyone else, to be shut up in 'ere? Lawst me temper a bit, p'raps, but what abaht *you*? Have *you* never lawst yer wool when someone's riled yer? Arst yer wife, if yer've got one! But 'ush! Not a word abaht you! You got a blue uniform on, provided by me and others aht o' the taxes, and I got a dirty ole coat. 'Ush! not a word abaht you. Not a word!"

"That's about right, Joe," laughed the sergeant. "Well, sir, I'll——"

"Oh, larf! larf if it seems funny to yer! Not that it improves yer face, mind; but you can't 'elp your dial, I suppose: it was all your mother could do for yer."

"That's right, Joe. Well, sir, I'll leave you to it. Probably you'll want to talk to him spiritual."

Joe watched the sergeant move away. "Come in here, sir," he said knowingly, and cocking his thumb over his shoulder towards the cell. "You come in here, sir, if you down't mind. 'Tain't a ballroom, not as you'd call it, but it's all I've got, jest for the time bein'. It's rather like a double-u, I'm afraid, but you and I've bin in worse dug-outs in our time, 'aven't we? I'd like to talk to you a bit, not as a man to a stinkin' copper, but as a man to a *man*."

They went into the dim cell, and Tony sat on the bed. Joe sat elsewhere.

"I ain't done nothin', sir, I swear it—nothin' more'n anyone else. When I found 'em marchin' me to the station, I could 'a' cried, I could."

"What exactly happened?"

"*Wurl*, sir, I 'eard that there was a 'ell of a mob rahnd the

tram depot, and I run there as fast as I could, hopin' to see some scrappin'—same as *you* would, sir——”

“Certainly, Joe.”

“Yes. O' *course* ! I wasn't for doin' anything meself ; honest I wasn't. Well, when I got to the edge of the crowd, I 'eard what it was : it was about five thousand coppers escortin' about five volunteers into the depot.”

“I know,” Tony explained. “I was one of the coppers myself.”

“Was you, sir ? Well, then, you saw the mounted specials clear the Rec. I was watchin' that—law, it was comic, it was !—I was watching it when we heard it all over the shop that the specials were takin' their sticks to the women, who had shouted out some real nasty bits at them——”

“They didn't, Joe. They never used their sticks.”

“Well, they brandished 'em, any old how ; I sor 'em. And the boys was ready to believe that they'd used 'em ; and all those arahn'd me, as you can imagine, began to talk blue murder and to swear that, if they could get near the cops, they'd learn 'em to hit women ; and what with all this excitement, I got a bit above myself and shouted ‘Up the Russians !’ I mean : what's the 'arm in that, sir ? I don't hold with all the Russians do, myself ; it was 'alf in fun, really ; and I'd said it before I knew what I'd done. And then I shied a stone or two—yuss, I'm ready to admit I did—jest in the excitement of the moment, and because everyone else was ; and, would you believe me, sir, I'd no sooner done it than a dirty sneak in a bowler 'at comes up and says, ‘Wodger say, mate ?’—jest like that, as though he was a pal—so I says to 'im, ‘Come on, chum ; we can knock spots off these b——s. Up the Russians, me lad !’ and he just seizes the sleeve of me coat and says, ‘I arrest yer. I'm a police awficer’—how was I to know he was a police officer, with his bowler 'at ?—and he whistles up one of them dirty, lousy specials——”

Tony bowed. “Thank you, Joe.”

“Oh, not meaning the like of you, sir—and between the two of 'em they shoved me along, as though I was a common lag ! *Course* I resisted ! Same as you would, sir, being a free man in a free country. I shahts, ‘Disabled Ex-Service Man’ ! But the bowler-'at feller only laughed at that—the lousy sneak ! I wonder what *he* done in the Great War. Spent most of his time in a Gents' Convenience, dodgin' the

air-raids, I'll be bound!—and he hands me over to a copper in uniform who 'ustled me along real rough—till I proper lawst me temper and landed 'im one on the jaw. Then they got nasty, and frog-marched me to that there van. I never bin frog-marched before: it's humiliatin', sir. . . . And I can't see what I done—quite. . . .”

Joe pausing, Tony took the opportunity to ask:

“Joe, do you realize who'll be presiding over the magistrates when your case comes on?”

“No, sir. Who?”

“Mr. Scrase.”

“Mr. Scrase! Law! o' course he will! I'd forgotten that. But that's good, sir”—Joe had suddenly brightened up—“he'll do all he can to get me aht of this, I know.”

“I'm afraid he won't, Joe.”

“Yes, sir; yes, he will. When I went to see 'im after Captain Scrase—after what 'appened—Mrs. Wylie and I went together—he was that nice and grateful for the—the lies I told 'im, and he said—why, I can remember his exact words!—he says, ‘I take it very kindly your comin' along like this, Wylie; and if ever I can do anything for yer, jest you lemme know.’”

“Yes, but”—Tony shook his head—“he's—he's thinking it his duty to be very severe just now.”

“Ow, *is* he?” Joe's accent had changed; there was menace in it.

Tony felt his heart tumble. “Joe,” he began, “I'm sure if Mr. Scrase studied his personal feelings, he'd like to help you. But he feels that he represents the State——”

“Ow, *does* he? Well, I don't 'appen to 'ave much use for the State at present. If the State brands me, maybe I can hit back. Yuss, Mr. Scrase doesn't know what he's handlin'. . . . Gaw! comic, isn't it, when you come to think of it? I could put him in his place all right.”

“But what good would it do? It wouldn't prevent him discharging what he considers to be his duty, and it would only injure very terribly a poor old gentleman and his wife——”

“Ain't he injurin' me? Six months! Six months they say we'll get. Six months for slammin' at a copper! . . . And it ain't as if it was a good slam, neither. I wish to Christ it was!”

Sitting on the bed, with elbows on knees and fingers idly

playing with a handkerchief, Tony opened all his arguments : what would be gained by it ? Joe had persevered for more than nine years, in a good and generous action, the memory of which would be a happiness always ; why undo it all now ?

But the walls of a jail were darkening around his listener, stunning thought in him and dulling mercy. “ ‘ What’d be gained,’ sir ? I could let him know that I once showed mercy to him, when he can’t show none to me, blast him ! ” Ah, but then, leave him out of it. Not mercy for him, but for Captain Scrase, who was given little enough. . . . “ Yes, sir, that’s all that matters to me. But I dunno ! I don’t trust myself any longer. Six months is six months. It’s human nature to want to get a little of your own back.”

“ I know,” said Tony, “ but——”

“ Your missus to see you, Joe.” The sergeant broke in upon their talk. “ Excuse me, sir. He’d better come now. He’s only got a few minutes.”

Joe jumped up and went out ; and Tony followed. There stood Tib Wylie, and directly Tony saw her he knew that she had come prepared to plunge into a sea of woe ; to be content with nothing but the deepest waves ; to swim and sink and flounder there as wildly as might be ; and to get a luxurious, if unperceived, enjoyment in flaunting her hysteria. She was even dressed as smartly and richly as possible for this rich occasion ; her bosom heaved under a wealth of lace and trinkets ; her red eyes dripped into the best handkerchief from her drawer ; her hands made gestures through the air in the best of her Sunday gloves.

“ Ow, there he is ! ” she cried, and rushed towards Joe, as he appeared. “ There he is ! ” He might have been a lost child, found again after weeks of despair. “ Ow, Joe, you didn’t do nothin’, I know—nothin’ to speak of. It’s a shyme—you that’s never been a police case in your life. Wodger do it for, Joe ? I always told yer you would. And now what’ll they do to yer ? I never want another night like last night—not to my dyin’ day. When I got home late from my work, Mrs. Whitfield rushed in from next door and said : ‘ They’ve took ’im ! They’ve took Mr. Wylie ! ’ And I just come over sick, and set down to recover meself. And I said——”

“ All right, ma,” soothed Joe, patting her shoulder. “ Don’t paw me about.”

“—and I said, ‘ It’s a lie,’ I said, ‘ they’ve got the

wrong man. Joe don't believe in getting on the wrong side of the police,' I said. And Mrs. Whitfield said, 'I'm afraid he's *for* it, now,' Mrs. Wylie'; and I said, 'No no! They'll let him awf with a caution. He's a Disabled Ex-Service Man. They can't be goin' to put him into quod. They *can't*.' But she said, 'I'd like to think so for your sake, Mrs. Wylie, but they say he's in for six months. You must bear up,' she said; 'you must bear up, you poor dear, and we'll all 'elp you,' and she was very good and comfortin'. Oh, she's a saint, that woman, she is."

"That's right, ma," said Joe, who didn't know what he was saying. "She's all right."

"And all last night I tawst and tawst. It's a mercy I didn't lose my reason. I thought it was goin', straight I did! And Mrs. Whitfield come in first thing this mornin'——"

"Yes, yes," interrupted Joe, and looked her up and down. 'I say, Tib. You do look a treat. You're all poshed up."

Tib wiped her eyes: obviously she was pleased by his praise. "Yes, I'm comin' to your trial," she said, "and I determined to do you credit"—which sentence immediately overcame her again, and she flooded into her handkerchief.

Joe called up jocosity, for everybody's sake. "Gaw, she looks all right, don't she, sir?" he asked of Tony. "Togged up regardless. Does *your* missus come to your trials like that?"

Tib lifted her blond head from the handkerchief, and explained it all in a voice that flowed soft and rich as cream, because pride was blending with her sorrows.

"Yes; at first I started awf straight away this mornin', without me 'at, and all adrift, as you might say. Then, suddenly, I determined not to let you dahn, so I run back—that 'ot and dithery as I was—and I dressed myself proper. And Mrs. Whitfield come in and 'elped me, and she brought me a little something that Mr. Whitfield had by him"—which memory broached another gush of feeling—"oh, she's a synte, that woman! I shall never forget all she done for me in this time of trouble. Never, I shan't! And I said to her, as she ministered to me, I said: 'I may have to go into the box and give him a good character. *Which* I will,' I says; 'and I'll let 'em see, in me own person, that he comes from respectable folk. And if they're going to put him into quod for what he never meant to do, why, then, I'll go dressed as I would to

his funeral and shyme 'em!'—a description of her misery and her goodness which broke her down completely.

Joe decided that another jest would suitably fill up the wait, so he said, "There won't be no separation allowance this time, Tib," and turned to Tony. "That's sô, ain't it, sir? No separation allowance this time, though I *shall* be joinin' His Majesty's Forces again, in a manner of speakin'."

"Nah, don't you worry yourself about that, Joe," said Tib, opening up her handkerchief to find a dry place. "I shall 'ave your disablement pension. I jest thought to pop in and inquire if they'd stop that; and they says no. . . . But oh! the shyme of it! A pensioned ex-Service man, *which* he is, sir, and there's no gettin' away from that. It's crool! Crool!"

Joe broke from her. He, too, was moved: moved by the cruelty of it, when he remembered his smashed shoulder, his shell-shock and his gas. "Now don't you unman me with your blubberin', Tib. If I've got to take it, I want to take it." And he swept both sides of his moustache.

But Tib was too far gone to listen to him. She had plunged into the uttermost depths and cared not what she cried from that hollow so long as it sounded worthy of her hysteria and her goodness. "And I'll wait for you, Jow," she loudly sobbed. "I'll be faithful to yer—I thought I'd like to tell you that. They may keep you years and years, but I'll be faithful to yer. I can't say more, can I? You've bin a good 'usband to me, in your *way*—I've always said so; and I'm not goin' back on it now. Not for anyone! They may keep you years and years for all I care. They may *'ang* yer, and I'll still be faithful to yer! They may do whatever they likes, but I'll wait for yer, carryin' me 'ead 'igh, in the face of them all. You'll think of that in your cell, won't yer? I'll tell everyone that you're in trouble, and that I ain't ashamed, because it was crool, crool . . . crool. . . ."

Perhaps it was well for all that the sergeant returned at this moment and called, "Look out, Joe. Smarten up! Here's the Mayor and Mayoress themselves to see you. Seems you're known to them."

("Damn!" thought Tony.)

"Law!" laughed Joe. "I'm popular with all classes, I am. Pull yourself together, Tib. We know this old codger. It's Mr. Scrase, Captain Scrase's father."

"Ow, lord!" Tib came up from the depths of her hysteria

to the surface, and stared around at a world of some interest.

"O' course it's 'im! He'll do something for you, Joe."

"Will he? I *don't* think."

"Yes, he will. Oh, I'm glad it's 'im! He said he would, don't you remember? He's come to tell yer."

"Has he? Thump!"

The Mayor and Mayoress entered. Each was scrupulously dressed as usual; each a study in black and white; the Mayor, a tall, narrow old gentleman with a humourless face; the Mayoress one of those soft, gentle, refined old ladies who give no quarter to strikers.

"Good morning, O'Grogan," said Alderman Scrase, observing Tony.

"Good morning, Mr. O'Grogan," said Mrs. Scrase, and glanced at his armlet. "I am glad to see you are on the right side."

"I am on no side, Mrs. Scrase," said Tony.

Mrs. Wylie ran impulsively to the Mayor. "Ow, he ain't done nothin', your worship. Or he ain't meant to. He can't be one of the strikers, because he ain't even in work. Let 'im awf this time, sir, and I'll answer he don't trouble you any more."

The Mayor motioned her, not unkindly, to one side. "All right, my good woman, don't excite yourself. He shall have justice; be sure of that."

"Nah, not justice; not justice. None of his family or mine has ever bin in trouble, sir."

"Jane." The Mayor turned to his wife. "You'd better talk to her. She seems a little overwrought."

"Yes, mum." Mrs. Wylie swam towards the Mayoress. "Oh, mum—your ladyship, you'll plead with 'im, won't you? Mr. Wylie never meant to come the wrong side of the police. He's a decent-livin' man really. He's my 'usband, and I ought to know. He has a proper respect for the law, and never meant to come up against it. I know all abaht him; and he's as good a 'usband as yours is, mum"—and she added in one of her sudden rich explanations—"in his different *way*."

"We wish to do everything we can, Mrs. Wylie," said the Mayoress. "We remember how your husband came to see us nine years ago, after my son's death. And you, I think."

"Yes, mum, I was there; and you'll use your influence

for 'im nah, won't you, after all he done for your pore boy?"

"I have no influence," sighed Mrs. Scrase.

"But after what he done——"

"Shurrrup, Tib!" murmured Joe.

"Very sorry to see you here, my man," said Alderman Scrase to Joe.

"Yes, Mr. Mayor, sir." Joe had come smartly to attention as a disabled ex-Service man should.

"Believe me, Wylie, when I realized who you were, and that I should be the presiding magistrate when they heard your case, I was distressed—very distressed. I hope that, whatever happens, you will remember that."

"Yuss, Mr. Mayor, sir."

"I felt compelled to come and see you before the case came on. I—er—I so want you to realize that often a magistrate has to pass sentences that go right against his feelings. He must, at all costs, be quite impersonal and—er—and impartial."

"Oh . . . yes, sir!"

"You'll have expert legal assistance, Wylie. All those arrested in this unfortunate strike have had that."

"It don't seem to have done 'em much good, sir, if I may say so," offered Joe.

"It did them all the good that it was possible to do for them. Our British courts are the fairest in the world. And I just want to say that, if the worst comes to the worst, I shall make it my personal business to find you employment when you come out."

And Mrs. Scrase touched him gently on the arm. "And while you are away, I'll look after your wife and keep an eye on your home."

"But I ain't condemned yet, mum," objected Joe.

"No, no, no." The Mayoress was rather flustered by this. "Of course not. But . . . but rioting just now, as the Mayor has said, has to be dealt with severely. Oh, believe me, I don't think you're as much to blame as your leaders. I only think that you've been misguided. That's why I'm prepared to care for your dependants."

Joe's under-lip protruded. "Maybe we ain't acceptin' any benefits, mum."

"No, no, no," pleaded the Mayoress. "You mustn't get stubborn. We want to be of help to you."

"I don't know that I want yer 'elp, mum. I'm all at sea abaht it—all in a fog. I served me country in the Great War, and now if me country's goin' to send me to clink jest for gettin' a shade above meself, well, I done with all your 'elps, see?"

"Yuss, and I should think so!" endorsed Mrs. Wylie, who had become very straight and dignified.

"I admit that, in a moment of forgettin' meself, I *did* 'it a policeman, but if they can't set against a little thing like that the fact that I enlisted on the Fourth of August, Nineteen-Fourteen, and that I got wounded and gassed, fightin' for my country——"

"That's all irrelevant, Wylie," interrupted Mr. Scrase. "As I've said in court many times lately, some of you men are working the ex-Service sentiment to death. It can't be used as an excuse for evading punishment. It now leaves us magistrates cold."

"Oh . . . I see, sir."

Mrs. Wylie took a step forward. "Tell 'em what you know, Joe, and bring 'em to their senses."

The Mayor was startled. Looking around for help, he announced: "This woman mustn't be allowed to talk like that."

"Nah, shut up, Tib," commanded her husband. But Tib's head with its golden hair began to toss and shake, as if it would not long be able to hold the anger and defiance fermenting in it.

"You see," explained Mrs. Scrase, touching Joe on the sleeve, and trying to be helpful, "in those days you were fighting for us and we were indeed grateful, but now when you've declared war on us——"

"On who, mum?"

"On the community."

"Aren't you mixin' up the community with your side, mum?"

"My wife is quite right," said the Mayor, who had been grateful for this help in time of trouble. "The strike is a war against the community, and you cannot at the same time declare war and expect mercy."

"I never 'card such——" announced Tib. "Don't you listen to them, Joe. *They've* got nothin' for you."

The Mayor was really angry. "*Will* you be quiet, my good woman. You *cannot* be allowed to speak in this way."

"Oh, can't I?" Tib stepped nearer to him, while her head tossed and shook. "Then I shall, then! *And* I don't care what you do to me, so don't think it. Let me tell you that Mr. Wylie and I know a thing or two, *which*, if we cared to use it, would make you think twice before you come the High and Mighty over *us*. You don't deserve all the kindness that's bin shown to you, and that's the truth, if I never speak it again in my life. Anyone can see that you're goin' to give 'im one of your savage sentences, whether there's anything in his favour or not. It's cowardly, all settin' on to one man because he shown some sympathy with his mates. You and your wealth—you don't need to strike for an extra shillin' or two a week, and you can't understand them that do. You and your manservants—'aven't I been in your house? And may I be struck dead if ever I set foot in it again!—you can get others to do your work, and spend yer time coming dahn here sentencing poor fellers to jail——"

"You are not doing your husband any good by this behaviour, Mrs. Wylie," rebuked the Alderman.

"What do I care if I am or not? What does it matter if I am or not? Anyone with 'alf an eye can see that you've made up your mind to sentence him, before ever 'is case is heard. You and your justice! You think I'd give a tanner for his chance of gettin' decent treatment with you for the beak? Not likely! And I pity all the other poor fellers that are in with 'im: with all my soul I do. And if when they come out they don't alter the Law of the Land so as to 'ave it over you, then they're bigger fools than I take 'em for; and that's all I'll say. I never was one for 'oldin' with this strike, but I hope to Christ, now, that it'll be a bloody revolution and learn some of the likes of you whether you're God Almighty, or whether you're nothin' so very much to write home about, after all. See? Yuss!"

At a signal from the Mayor, Tony led her away gently, while she shouted backward: "Oh, yuss, you can order 'im to shift me. You can do what you bloody well like with me. You can 'ave me up in your —— court, and sentence me to jail, f'r all I care. You can come and fetch me yerself, if you like." This was shrieked, for now she was almost out of hearing. "Here! I'll give you my address. It's 'Mrs. Wylie, Thirty-seven, Appleton Street, Thamesmouth, Essex.'

"And I don't care who knows it. No." She gave this

last sentence to Tony, as, breathless, her bosom heaving, she touched the hat and the hair on her trembling head.

"Terrible; terrible," sighed Mrs. Scrase.

The silence was broken by the filing of several policemen into the hall. The Mayor, bracing back his shoulders and adjusting his eyebrows after Mrs. Wylie's assault, looked at his watch.

"There are only a few minutes before the court sits. Sergeant, you had better take this man now. . . . His wife can wait here, no doubt."

Tib rushed to her husband. "No, Joe, I don't want to see them put yer into yer cell. It might upset me. I'll go up to the police court now." After patting her eyes and nose with her handkerchief, she straightened her hat, arranged her clothes, and said with some pride: "They'll give me a special seat, won't they, in the public gallery, and somewhere right in front? Yes, of course they will. I'll go and take my place now. You'll see me, Joe; and I'll keep smilin' back at yer. It may sort-a strengthen yer, see?"

And, smiling already, she walked away to her sorrowful but magnificent privilege.

"I must go to the court now, Wylie," said the Mayor. "I beg you will remember all I've said. I meant it most sincerely. And I am quite ready to forget all your wife's—er—abuse. She is naturally overwrought. It is all so distressing—so distressing."

"Terrible," sighed Mrs. Scrase, who was not so disposed to forgive.

"Thank you, sir."

"Come on, then," the sergeant commanded Joe; and Joe, clicking his heels by way of a salute to the Mayor, marched in front of the sergeant to his cell. The sergeant locked the door on him.

"Poor misguided man," sighed the Mayoress, as she and her husband turned to go.

Tony, without much hope, attempted an appeal. "Deal leniently with him, sir."

The Mayor paused; he had no great love for St. Wilfrid's curate. "I shall deal justly with him, O'Grogan. When the country is faced with revolution, lenience is itself a crime."

"Of course, of course," his wife echoed him. "Poor man, I'm afraid he'll have to take his sentence."

"He was extraordinarily kind to Kit in his last days, sir. I was there, and saw how good he was."

Alderman Scrase raised one hand a little way, and let it fall, frustrated. "I cannot—I must not let any personal consideration like that stand between me and the administration of justice. Come, my dear."

Mrs. Scrase, before going, stated her view. "I can't see that Kit has anything to do with it, Mr. O'Grogan. It is not our duty to be gentle with men who are destroying the country that others died for."

"Come, my dear," repeated the Alderman. "I am already late."

And they went out together to fulfil their task, however painful it might be, of saving England. And Tony watched them go.

His thoughts were jarred by the loud ringing of an electric bell. A voice called, "Bring 'em along," and the policemen opened the cell doors and brought out some of the prisoners, forming them into a line. Joe was the last of the line. "Gawd, I must spruce meself up a bit," he said laughing. After he had dusted down his clothes, he looked along the line of his fellow prisoners. "Crikey!" he exclaimed. "Fall in, the Coldstream Guards! Tallest on the right, shortest on the left!"

"Silence there!" roared the sergeant.

The electric bell rang again.

Joe winked at Tony. "It's 'Over the top and the best of luck' now, sir," he whispered.

Tony went upstairs to the court.

The trial of the seventeen lasted five hours. Late in the afternoon the bench of sixteen magistrates, led by Alderman Scrase, retired to consider their decisions. They returned after half an hour's absence, and Alderman Scrase addressed the court. He spoke quietly, but the court had sunk to such a stillness that every word was audible. So carefully dressed, so handsome, so grave, he looked worthy to be the head and voice of Thamesmouth; and Tony was surprised to find himself admiring him; surprised to catch, instantaneously and for the first time, the knowledge that, if Kit had not inherited his father's simplicity, he had drawn his rectitude from him.

"I desire to say that the Bench has regarded the cases before us to-day as matters of the utmost seriousness. We have not come—er—lightly—to our decisions. This is a very critical time through which our country is passing, and we consider that we should be failing in our duty if we did not make sharp examples of men who, unwittingly perhaps, are endangering it more than they know. Here are citizens of Thamesmouth who are ready to forget, on the slightest provocation, the protection, the security, the—er—liberty to go about their lawful occasions—which is ensured for them by the discipline and order of their town, and by the services and the amenities which it supplies. They threaten our town with mob law, little realizing that nothing will destroy a town so quickly—and all that we hold dear, and all that the centuries have built for us—as that the mob, which is undisciplined itself and without any sanctions by which it can achieve discipline in others, should take the power into its own hands. We will have no mob law in Thamesmouth. We earnestly hope that the sentences now to be passed will act as deterrents to any other thoughtless and irresponsible persons who may be contemplating insurrectionary behaviour. The sentences are as follows :

"Albert Isaac Western, two months' hard labour on each of the three charges, the sentences to run consecutively, making six months in all.

"Charles Arthur Glascock, two months' hard labour on two charges, to run concurrently, making two months in all.

"Joseph William Wylie, two months' hard labour, on two charges, to run consecutively, making four months in all——"

At this a woman rose, sobbing, in the body of the court. "No! No! He ain't done nothin'," she cried. A policeman removed her gently, and at the door she turned and cried again, "Cowards! Cowards!" Tony left his place to be with her and help her, while the Alderman's voice, unshaken, pursued its duty :

"Horace Victor Langden, two months' hard labour on each of the three charges, to run consecutively——"

In the echoing gallery above the staircase Tony found Mrs. Wylie sobbing into her handkerchief and heeding little of the comfort that a kindly policeman proffered. Other women were waiting there too.

"Will they take him away to-night?" she asked.

"I don't know," Tony answered. "I'll go and find out everything for you." He went down to the police station and sought out the sergeant.

"What happens to him now, Sergeant?"

"Coleborough Jail happens to him, sir."

"Yes, but when?"

"Almost at once, sir."

"What, this afternoon?"

"Yes, sir. At a time like this, we want these cells empty for the next comers."

"Will his wife be able to say good-bye to him? She's upstairs."

"Oh, yes, sir. . . . Bring her outside, where the others are waiting. We'll let you know when she can come in."

So Tony brought her down to a lobby where they stood together on the happier side of the first of the iron grilles. Other weeping women, with silent men companions, waited there too. Tony and Tib Wylie were nearest the grille; and in about an hour's time a policeman drew it and said pleasantly, "Come on, ma. You'll have forgotten all about this in a year's time."

"Oh, thank you," answered Mrs. Wylie, and passed through. She was too spent to do anything but sob now. "Thank you very much."

"Here's your missus, Joe," called the policeman when they were once again outside the cells.

Joe was waiting there. "Well, Tib," he said, attempting cheerfulness. "I properly torn it for yer this time."

"It's not you," sobbed Tib. "You ain't done nothin'. At least, nothin' to speak of. It's them. Wicked; that's what it is; jest wicked."

"Well, well, well. Four months ain't too long. I don't mind that so much. But they'll have it up against me that I've been in quod."

"I know. I know."

"Make it a bit hard for you in the street, won't it, Tib?"

"Oh, I shan't let anyone come it over me!" answered Mrs. Wylie, throwing up her head. "I was thinkin' it all over in the court. What I says is: if my man's done summat they can justly put him away for, why, then I keeps myself to myself; but when he's done nothin' rightly to be ashamed of—or

nothin' but what a fine would pay for—why, then I walks the streets with me 'ead as 'igh as ever."

"And there's another thing," Tony put in. "This sentence is hardly an ordinary sentence, Joe. You must think of yourself as a sort of political offender, and sometimes that's no great disgrace. You're a political martyr, eh? You are quite proud of having been wounded in the war; why not be proud of going to jail for your new cause—what?"

"Yuss, dear," endorsed Mrs. Wylie. "You 'ark to what the minister says. Only larst night Mrs. Whitfield was tellin' me of a minister that went to jail for havin' incense and what-not in 'is church, and all 'is congregation were at the prison gates to welcome 'im when he come out! He thought nothin' of it. Nor did anyone else, either."

"Still . . ." grumbled Joe, "four months' 'ard is four months' 'ard, whether political or religious or anythin' else. That's what I say."

"Listen, Joe," said Tony. "You've given up all thought of 'getting your own back' on Mr. Scrase, haven't you?"

"That I 'aven't!" assured Joe.

"I should think not indeed!" agreed Tib.

"Ah, Joe, but you must," pleaded Tony. "Listen to me a minute. I want you to think hard of Captain Scrase——"

"Christ! I been doin' it, sir, I don't mind tellin' yer. I been tryin' to do it 'ard ever since I got me sentence . . . because I don't want to let 'im dahn."

"Oh, splendid, Joe!"

"But it ain't easy, sir."

"I know it's not. And that's why I want you to give me a promise now—a solemn pledge if you like—that you'll never, never, *never* say anything about it. You'd gain nothing——"

"I'd get some of me own back. Isn't that gainin' something?"

"Yuss!" nodded Mrs. Wylie.

"Well, then, it's gaining too much. You've taken a hard knock, I know—but you'd hit two old people a hundred times harder—oh, God, yes! You'd lay a shadow on the rest of their lives."

"Ain't *be* layin' a shadder on Joe's life?" demanded Mrs. Wylie.

"We've agreed that it needn't prove too great a shadow, Mrs. Wylie. Look here, old man; like you I've been thinking hard in that court." Tony was about to play every gun on the

old man's sentiment. "Do you remember that room in the farmhouse at Proven?"

"Yes, sir, I should reckon I do! A cushy spot, Proven, if it hadn't been for *that*."

"And how you and I came back, after seeing the battalion march off, and found his body——"

"Lord, yes, sir!"

"—and how you guessed at once what had happened: and do you remember how you said that it was 'proper sporting' of the Colonel?"

"Yes, sir; and so it was, I shall always say."

"And we swore a kind of solemn oath that we'd never tell the real story; and then we laid him in his grave, and you said, I remember, that, as far as you were concerned, he could lie comfortable. Are you going to make him turn in that grave now?"

Joe was silent.

"And now—I only thought of this, sitting in the court—do you remember how you made the cross yourself, and how you wrote on it, 'Killed in action'? Are you going to cross out that inscription?"

"Cross it out, sir?"

"Well, that's what it comes to, if you begin to tell people. Leave it there, Joe. You put it there yourself."

"Well, sir"—after a sullen pause Joe snapped this out, as if he had best speak before he changed his mind—"crikey I *will*, sir. There, I've said it!"

"Oh, good, Joe!"

"And, Tib, don't you breathe a word, neither. I ought never to 'a' told yer—and that's the truth."

"Ow, Jow!" Mrs. Wylie was deeply aggrieved. "'Ow can you say that? What you tell me to keep secret is locked in me own bosom. 'Course it is!"

"Well, I hope so," said her husband rudely.

"I won't say nothin', but I tell you this: I shan't take from 'em anythin' that they offer me."

"Don't be a fool, Tib," laughed Joe, who had become quite merry with his sense of righteousness. "Take all the lady'll give yer; I should."

Then the wives and friends were ordered to leave.

"Well, good-bye, Tib," said Joe, giving her a last kiss, after which he brushed his moustache.

"Ow, Joe." Tib's misery burst out anew. "I can't bear to think of you marchin' rahnd and rahnd a prison yard. Oh, he can't do it, sir, not with his varicose veins; and his feet do *draw* so."

"They won't make him do anything that he can't do, Mrs Wylie," Tony comforted.

"March?" exclaimed Joe. "Ain't I marched a few thousand miles in the army? Crums, I can do it on me 'ead! Well, good-bye, sir."

"Good-bye, Joe. What you've done this evening will make you happy all the time you're in prison."

"*That's* all right, sir. Don't you worry about that, sir. Let the ole gentleman be 'appy—though it ain't for *his* sake—blast his bloody eyes!"

"Good-bye, Joe," moaned Mrs. Wylie, laying her hands on his shoulders. "I'll be waitin' for yer at the prison gates. I'll be standin' there when you come aht."

"Good-bye, Tib. 'Op it now, because the bugle's gawn. Visitors ashore! Good-bye, ole gurl, and 'keep the 'ome fires burnin'."

This jest he emphasized by a wink at Tony.

"I'll look after her, Joe," said Tony, and led the weeping Tib away.

CHAPTER VI

THE TALE OF JOHN THAMESMOUTH

THE strike broke after eight days. At noon of Wednesday, May 12th, everybody in the streets of Thamesmouth—and the world had come abroad because the day was bright and sunny—was telling every passer-by the news: the General Council had called off the strike. The General Council of the Trades Union Congress had saved its face by the acceptance of a “basis for negotiation between the miners and the mine-owners” submitted by a mediating statesman; and by all means let them have this little mask to wear; one knew that the faces behind the mask were the faces of defeated and anxious men. Tony felt very sorry for them.

There was a curious change in the face of the streets. All was liveliness under the sunlight. In tune with the universal relief the sunlight itself seemed to be dancing. Buses bowled along again, their rightful drivers at the wheel. The trams came out, grating along their lines. One behind another they came out, the General Manager (Mr. Edmund Doyle) driving the first; and high was the laughter when the people saw the wire-netting screens nailed over the windows, and the wire-netting cages protecting the drivers. The drivers looked a little bashful in their cages; and the Funny Men of the pavements were hardly restrained from trying the impact of a stone or two against that netting. As a “gesture” the procession of the trams was not a success; there being no strike left for a background.

This was the end of the civil war in England, May, 1926. Not a shot had been fired; and there were no casualties except a few wild lads and a few old loafers now kicking their heels in prison. Everyone felt extraordinarily pleased; and the Wireless Chorus broadcast a rendering of Blake’s “Jerusalem.” As an indelicate curate in Thamesmouth phrased it: the world had been feeling industrially sick for a long time, and now it

had vomited in England and felt much better. The other countries which had sat in "the spectators'" seats to watch the play retired and expressed their applause by lifting the English pound some points above par. Sterling rose to 4.87 in New York, its highest value since the war.

On the Sunday evening after the strike Tony preached in the pulpit of St. Wilfrid's a sermon that was like a "repeat performance" of the famous sermon preached during the railway strike. Only the night before he had braced his will to this duty, and deliberately charged the chambers of his musket, *The Thamesmouth Advertiser* providing the nitric acid for his gun-cotton. *The Thamesmouth Advertiser* had appeared that day with a full report of the trial of Joe Wylie and his companions and had assailed them as "cowardly ruffians" and rejoiced in their "exemplary sentences." So Tony filled his musket. The Vicar would say that its discharge just now was inexpedient, but bah! Mr. Broadley's Expediency, its name was Fear. Now, if ever, was the time to tell his people that they would be most patriotic (as they so desired to be), and would serve their England best, if they expressed her real heart, which was liberal and humane. Always this idea was a leaping and consuming flame in him; and he mounted the pulpit with a sermon of some force and beauty beating at his head in its eagerness to escape. A very quiet sermon, as always; not brutal, not a wielding of the lash, but a loving hint that imagination should break its gyves and triumph over vindictiveness.

As he reached the pulpit floor it seemed to him that it might be that Sunday during the railway strike all over again. The picture was the same. He stood in the pulpit; the hymn died, and the people sat down and stared up at him. He saw Alderman Scrase in his seat, for this was an exceptional Sunday. He saw Mr. Bray in the other churchwarden's pew, with hands linked over his stomach, for Evensong was Mr. Bray's favourite service. The lamps in nave and chancel clicked out, except one on each bracket and the very bright one hanging over his head. He stood in the heart of a cone of light. And he leaned an elbow on the lectern, swept the large congregation with his eyes, and began to speak.

The method of his sermon was the same. He dramatized his meaning in the story of a single man. A man that never lived, perhaps; and yet lived in every street in Thamesmouth,

almost in every house. Let him call him John Thamesmouth.

The eyes of the congregation were fixed on him like children's eyes, thirsting for the tale.

He showed them John Thamesmouth marching with the 15th Royal West Essex, "Thamesmouth's Own," over the roasting sands of Sinai beneath an oven of a sky. The battle of Romani waited for them, and the exhausted, silent men staggered towards it; and every now and then the voice of John called out a jest or an obscenity (a shiver passed over this congregation which so disliked reality, but Tony quietly proceeded)—called out a jest or an obscenity which enabled the tottering column to laugh again, and stumble on. He told them how the same men, a year later, marched to Ypres and Paschendale, "where the battalion now lies," and how, at the halts, they muttered murder and mutiny, but the voice of John, with its reiterant "Did I ever tell you this one, boys?" brought them back to laughter and disabled the mutiny again and again. He gave them the last picture of all: a French village where the new battalion stood to meet the last drive of the enemy, and John, believing it to be the end, put his rifle to his shoulder and said, "Come on, boys! You didn't expect to join the army and *live*, didjer?"

"The next second a machine-gun bullet smashed his shoulder and its brother broke my head. Eight days ago Thamesmouth sentenced that man to four months' hard labour. No doubt he deserved something, because he had shouted a little sedition on behalf of his mates, thrown a stone in their interests, and resisted capture by the police; and yet I feel—I cannot explain my feeling; I can only tell it to you—that we sentenced him for the very qualities that we made great use of ten years ago: his irrepressible spirits, his Cockney impudence, his muddle-headed loyalty to his side, his sentimentality, and that peculiar national irony which will always talk sedition rather than patriotism. And I certainly feel that if we rejoice in his sentence, if we call him, as our local journal has done, 'a cowardly ruffian,' then we leave it to him to be a truer portrait than we are of our great, ironic, and tolerant nation."

Except for Alderman Scrase, who chose to regard it as an

insult to the mayoralty, and Mr. Bray, who said he was getting a bit sick of all this Socialism, and Mrs. Scrase who reflected her husband, this sermon did not greatly offend the congregation. It had been too well done. Outside the church walls, however, among those who had not heard it, the rumour of its argument created a fine uproar. Other clergy of the diocese, who had lacked Tony's courage to speak, accused him of tactlessness or bumptiousness, according as they were good timid men or bad timid men. The *Advertiser*, not disposed to be attacked, published a leader next week in which it castigated "this *enfant terrible* of the Church in Thamesmouth," ascribing "pert ambition" to him and "a love of notoriety." Readers, who knew nothing of the sermon's balance, humility and tenderness, wrote abusive letters to the *Advertiser* for several weeks afterwards; and the *Advertiser* gladly printed them. Some anonymous correspondents sent their abuse direct to the preacher. The Vicar said nothing because, to his surprise, quite a few of the congregation seemed to resent the unfairness of the attack on their curate, and to think either that "the sermon was not as bad as all that," or that "it was rather beautiful in its way." Honor most palpably took fright at the attack and wished he hadn't provoked it. And Tony, not having heard his few defenders, felt very lonely.

Indeed he was astonished at the depression which held him, and wearied him, during these weeks in which a column of the *Advertiser* was devoted to his dissection by would-be wits, and any letter on his plate might be a letter of vulgar insult. He ought to have been able to laugh, shrug his shoulders, and get on with his work; that is what he would have liked to be able to do; but he could not; he allowed a sadness to gather round him, in which he doubted his every desire, hated many of his motives, and was sick with the futility of the world. He knew, for instance, that, though there had been love and loyalty in that sermon, there had also been not a little intolerance, not a little self-conceit, not a little relish for the coming sensation, and, poorest of all, not a little malice against the *Advertiser* for having despised his poems. "I dunno!" he would say to himself. "I'm weary, weary, weary. I give it all up."

And then one morning he came down to breakfast to find many strange letters on his plate. The uppermost, as he

guessed from its local postmark and its loud, slack hand, was an essay in abuse. He read it through, and it hurt him abominably. He picked up the second, and gave no sign to Honor that its envelope had dispersed all his enemies by first changing them into ghosts and then cancelling their existence. Its postmark was Montreal's ; its hand Mary Leith's.

"Dear Mr. O'Grogan (he read),

"I think Daddy and I are really going abroad. We are supposed to be sailing from Quebec on June 20th, but I will not believe it until we are well out on the St. Lawrence!! Oh, beloved gulf of St. Lawrence!

"I simply cannot realize that I shall be in England so soon. In fact I'm sure I shan't be: something is certain to go wrong. So much happiness is not good for people. We are going to Scotland first, and then down, or do you say 'up' to London, for a few weeks, when we go on the Continent. I am terribly, awfully, hysterically excited about it all—though Daddy is quite calm. I thought I would let you know, because it would be so nice to see you again.

"Sincerely,

"Mary Leith, but I expect you have forgotten her. Oh, Mary, how can you lie so?

"P.S.—Please pray that nothing goes wrong."

He laid the letter down, and Honor could not know that the chambers of his brain were alight and the chambers of his body astir with foretasted joy. He was possessed by that exultant peace, that sense of serenity and integration which comes from yielding to one's real nature. He was going to call up in a beautiful creature a fullness of adoration ; and that was what he really desired. He was going to enjoy the exquisite aches and unrests of loving her ; and that was what he desired too. The censor in his mind veiled from view, though the veil was thin, that in the end he would probably leave unsatisfied the adoration he had created, and Mary would go wounded from him.

CHAPTER VII

A VISITOR TO ENGLAND

BUT Mary did not come that year. Something "went wrong" and it was not till May of the following year that her ship put out from Quebec into the Gulf of St. Lawrence. And all those eleven months Tony lived quietly and pleasantly with his resolve to take her when she came. The acid of his disappointment, on hearing that she was not coming after all, burnt the resolve a little deeper in his heart.

One morning in May of 1927 his car rolled up to the side entrance of the Ritz in Arlington Street, and he stepped out. He was wanting to feel serene and full of glee, but his breathing was irregular and his hand shook as he closed the door of the car. Ten seconds and he would be seeing Mary, who waited in the entrance hall. He would know again what her features were. Up the steps at a run—for surely one was full of glee—and there she was, coming towards him down the long corridor with a little inchoate, twisting smile.

"Well, here we are, Mary!" He took both her hands.

"Yes, isn't it just marvellous?"

"My turn to bring the car to the hotel door this time."

"Oh, it's great."

"My dear, it's wonderful."

And yet he had taken a slight, a very slight, fall of disappointment, and he knew that she, studying his face, had taken the same fall too. Memory and dream had created one Mary—one Tony—and they must alter a little, shrink a little, to fit the real person. And the real Mary, this smiling stranger, was beautiful enough, God save us! Her nose was small and straight and soft, was it—her searching eyes a dog's brown, her black hair very glossy and faintly waved; her neck very

white? Her dress to-day was all sapphire blue; a small felt hat, a jumper with low belt, and a pleated skirt whose pleats opened and swayed with her movement. Her legs were in stockings of sunburn silk, and her feet in brown strap shoes. And as she walked she had a way of pointing her left toe more than her right. He had never noticed this before. It was enchanting.

"Now, child," said he, releasing one hand but retaining the other as he led her towards the car, "you gave me one whole day in New York. I shall therefore give three times as much to you"

"What does that mean?"

"It means that I am going to purloin three whole days out of your seven in London."

"Why, yes. Of course. That'll be just marvellous."

"I may even take four," said Tony, thus emboldened.

To this she gave only a dubious lift of her shoulders.

"No," said Tony promptly. "Four would be absurd."

"Oh, I don't know," said Mary. "We'll see. There's Daddy to be thought of. He must be made happy, for he's quite a dear—really."

"I am sure he is."

"And"—her eyes turned mischievous, as she shocked him with an Americanism—"the big guy gets angry if——"

Strange that the slang phrase *did* hurt him! It was as if a breath of doubt had misted some impossibly exquisite picture. This old note of childish levity, why did it make her different from what he wanted? And what *did* he want? He didn't know; he knew only that he wanted Mary Leith to be the thing that he wanted.

"Well, come and get in the car, my dear, if we've so little time together."

"Yes. Oh, heck! I'm thrilled—so thrilled! Where are we going to?"

Where were they going to? Sitting in the driver's seat, Tony, whose mind always leapt to see a parable in a simple incident, immediately gave to these words their deeper meaning.

"I don't know, Mary. It's for you to say."

"You're never very helpful, are you? That's what you said in New York."

"Ah, well. . . . The Abbey, I suppose . . . and St. Paul's. . . ."

"Oh, *please*. . . . Yes."

So together they visited the Abbey and St. Paul's; and leading her among the quiet aisles, Tony spoke, since he must speak of something, of architectural periods, Norman, Early English, Tudor, Renaissance. And Mary was interested—sometimes. When interested her answers were intelligent, though uninformed. At other times he knew that she was interested with only half her mind; the other half seemed to be resting idly in a happiness which it did not understand, as when a child rests against someone it loves.

There was a wonderful summer light in the streets of London when again he was driving her through them; London was a city of shining mist and golden buildings beneath a pale blue sky; and of a sudden she lolled back in her seat, happy, and exclaimed, "Oh, this is best. Listen: let's just drive on and on quietly. May we?"

Then they were driving on and on, he sometimes pointing out "the places of historic interest" or the places of his childhood's memory. She was interested in both, but much more in those of his childhood's memory. Kensington High Street, along whose pavement-kerbs he had so often, at six years old, been either a steam-engine or a tram—"Oh, what a darling!" St. Austin's Road, with his father's church, where Keatings, pretending to be blind, had been led by Derek's hand into the Children's Service, his eyes tight closed and his body bumping into every child he passed, while Peggy and Tony came giggling and apprehensive behind, and waiting for a vision of the Wrath of God—"Oh, what an *adorable* family you must have been!"—St. Paul's School and Colet Court, where he had been most justly whacked—"Oh, I'm sure you didn't deserve it! But tell me some more. I *am* enjoying this."

"Gosh, and it all happened years before you even existed! I wish it hadn't."

"Why?"

"Because it makes me old enough to be your father."

"Oh, hardly that."

"Yes, hardly that. Don't let's be old enough to be anybody's fathers."

The Broadway. Barnes Common. Richmond. The River.

They had lunch at a quiet restaurant, and most of the time he was silent.

"A penny for your thoughts!" she said, so tritely as to disappoint him again. Hang it, what *did* he want?

"What need for you to waste your pence, my child? You must know."

"I don't. What are they?"

There was no answer but in his eyes, which smiled at her teasingly.

"Oh, do tell me."

"I was thinking about you."

"What about me?"

"I was wondering why there are some people in the world with whom one can be quite happy so long as they are at one's side. There *are* a few people like that, aren't there?"

She lifted her eyes to him.

"Oh, yes . . . yes. . . ." she said.

In the evening when he was bidding her good-bye on the steps of her hotel he said, "Now that I have shown you London, I want to show you England. I should like to show you a great spread of her in a single view. And the best of her. Which, I need hardly say, is Sussex."

"Oh, of course! Sussex is the county you adopted, isn't it?"

"Now how should you know that?"

"Didn't you tell me in New York, eighteen months ago?"

"Yes; but fancy your remembering it! Well, come and look at it to-morrow."

"No, not to-morrow. I must look after Daddy. I must lead him out somewhere. I take him very seriously, you see."

"Certainly you must. The big guy is doubtless rather fond of you. . . . Which day can you give me, then?"

"Listen: what about Thursday?"

"This about Thursday: I shall be here, on this spot, at ten o'clock; and we'll drive to the North Downs, and climb Leith Hill, and you will see the whole of Sussex spread before you. And you will feel like Moses on Mount Pisgah, looking at the Promised Land."

She gave her little skip of delight. "Oh, it's too good to be true. I've always wanted to see Sussex."

"Since when?"

"Oh, gracious, I don't know! Since you told me about it in New York."

"Well, you shall see it from Leith Hill, which bears your

name—have you noticed that, Mary Leith? That's why I chose it."

"Oh, don't be so dumb! Good-bye, till Thursday;" and she ran into the hotel.

Tony and Mary stood side by side on the crown of Leith Hill, with the bracken about their feet, and a silence in the sky. The old familiar landscape lay spread beneath their eyes; the same landscape, only seen from the North, that Tony and Jill Daubeney had looked down upon, twelve years before, when they stood together on Wolstonbury's crown. The Weald billowed away, a tossed carpet of tillage and meadow, whose hedgerows patterned it into diamonds and squares, and whose woods lay dark on it like massed embroidery. And behind all this, between a haze and the sky, ran the long parade of the South Downs, with Wolstonbury standing in front, its foot in the haze. Tony pointed to the little individual things: the mansions and the twisting lanes, the clustered villages and the far-off spires; and Stratton Lye where he had taught his boys, and Albourne where he had lived in his little cottage of Sheep's Eye.

They sat down; and as in the churches he had talked of architecture, so here, since he must talk of something, he talked of geological structure: of the great dome of chalk which had once joined the North to the South Downs, till the action of water had washed its heart away and moulded the wide valley of the Sussex Weald, for him to live in and to love. He told her that only here, in Southern Britain, would she find the great chalk downs, because they had lain below the ice-cap. And he pictured the early men of Britain moving east and west along the dry bare ridges, with their fearful glance ever dropping to the wet, wolf-haunted woods below.

She was as flattering a listener as Jill; more so, perhaps, because she was younger, and seemed to rest in his talk as in an element that soothed her. She was bad for him, he said; and having said so, poured out for her one of the great enthusiasms of his life: England. England, so still and so beautiful; of patterns so miniature and so manifold; rolling everywhere into hills and hollows that made play with the light; greener than any other land because she was all pasture, and her pasture

was a deep blue-green ; embroidered everywhere with woodland, and the trees of her woods more varied than any other land could boast—look ! her oaks and beeches and elms, her limes and ashes and chestnuts all dressing themselves for summer in her own slow, hasteless way. Nothing like her anywhere. And the moisture of her earth and her winds and the lazy good-nature of her people had both played their part in making her beautiful ; her earth and her winds, laden with moisture, sooner or later healed the scar of every garish building by covering it with lichen, moss and rusty greens ; and her people, improvising all things, threw their hedges and their roadways where they wanted them, left their villages to muster as they would, and lost every battle but the last. And the birds sang over her all the year round.

Mary heard him out.

“ I should like to live here for ever,” she said.

Tony stood up and, resolving to be English himself, exchanged sentiment for cynicism. Looking over the vast garden of the Weald, he murmured, “ Well, we ought to value her. She’s expensive enough.”

“ How do you mean ? ”

“ She costs us four shillings in every pound, my dear. Still . . . still . . . it might be worse spent. . . . ”

He had fallen into a reverie.

“ To say nothing of a million lives,” he added.

He led her down the red path through the bracken, and for the first time in their friendship—after all, this was but the third day they had spent together and Tony had no gift for philandering ; he wanted to love terribly, not to philander—he put his arm into hers, and finding her wrist, clasped his fingers round it. She did nothing and said nothing ; but a little later her arm pressed his for a quick moment against her side. It was no more, perhaps, than the venting of a deep affection, but it fed to flame his hope that he would be able to love her as he desired.

Walking down the twisted track, he let his gaze rest unseen upon her. He watched that dainty pointing of her left foot.

“ Tired ? ” he asked.

“ A little.”

So he slowed their step, but said nothing ; and it was she who suddenly exclaimed, “ Oh, but I’m happy ! I’m happy ! ”

Tony smiled. "Yes, we've had another wonderful day. And to think that it's only our third together!"

"Yes, I feel as if I had known you always."

"I do too."

They were strolling on, and within his silence he was sifting and weighing his thoughts about her. What did he want of her? First, he wanted to believe her the ideal creature whom he had waited so long to love. And was she not this? Oh, yes—it was only that childish lightness which made him doubt at times. She was young; she was beautiful; she had humour and gaiety; she had intelligence—more than she knew, for she would often bemoan her stupidity; she had moods of pensiveness which hinted at depths yet to be sounded; above all, she was loving—that affectionate pressure of his arm! He loved her then: it was exultation, it was release, it was peace to know it. . . . Stay, though: he knew also that he was out to awake in her an irremediable adoration, no less, which probably he must leave hungry and suffering in the end. Was this love; or was it a cruel possessiveness? Oh, never let me hurt you, Mary—but he knew that his craving for her adoration was stronger than his desire not to hurt her, and he would go on.

While he was thinking thus, with his arm through her arm, and his hand clasped over the back of her hand, she suddenly gathered his long fingers and threaded them lovingly through her own.

They had one more day together. It was her last day in England before her father and she set forth on their travels in Europe. He spent it driving her to the pleasant green places that lie against London: up to the high levels of Wimbledon and down among the hills and deer of Richmond Park; to any of those littered commons where Londoners, in their starved poetry, go to find a prairie. And in all these places, as he told her, two ghosts of yesterday walked: old Raking, a stocky schoolboy ever breaking prison to find a far horizon, and O'Grogan Minor, rambling with him and hoping he had found a friend. The evening gathered round them; and he gave her a quiet dinner, and drove her back into the lights and traffic of the London night.

Now that day was gone ; and Mary was gone too ; and he could smile sometimes to think of the wide difference between the Rev. Antony O'Grogan whom the people met in the Thames-mouth streets and the Antony O'Grogan who dwelt in his own head, burdened with thoughts of a slight girl. The outer Tony was a priest nearing forty who was liked in the streets because he had a jest for all ; an amusing guest who was welcomed in the drawing-room because he had mischief in his talk ; a well-known writer whom the young men called " sir," because his hair was grey at the sides. The inner Tony was no other than O'Grogan Minor, grown older, but again tormented with love. Which of the two was the dream ? If he was sometimes ashamed of O'Grogan Minor, he would remember a phrase out of the past. " Powerless. I am always powerless where *this* calls."

Now that Mary was out of his sight he doubted his love no longer. He was a pacing prisoner now, tormented till he knew that he possessed her love. Surely—surely he had it—or was it that she had only inclined towards him in her childish affectionateness ? Damn ! one could not know. Day followed day, and one knew no more. Each could bring nothing but its silence to answer this pacing questioner. He began almost to *feel* this silence, like walls around him. Oh, to know ! to know ! Better, if it must be, one sharp pain, and the end of suspense.

They had chatted of books, and especially of that wistful tale which had troubled his boyhood : the tale of Gerda the Shepherdess who had wanted so sadly to possess some one person for herself and had abandoned her hope in the end.

" Oh, I wish I could read it," Mary had said. " I'm sure I'm just like Gerda."

And now he sought in every shop for a copy of that book, but found it nowhere. It had perished twenty years before. So he took down his own copy and wrote in it, " Mary Leith from Antony O'Grogan," and sent it to her father's agents in Paris. When it would reach her, God knew. And one day dispossessed another, and was in its turn dispossessed ; and each could only surround with silence his fixed question : " Is she thinking always of me as I am of her ?" Now that memory could see her figure but vaguely, as it roved in the mists of Europe, he was creating it into the very symbol of all that he had wanted : Mary Leith

with her black silk hair, her white silk skin and warm loving eyes ; with all those little movements that so delighted him—now a mystified frowning of her eyebrows, one eyebrow tilting higher than the other, now a frustrated lift of her sloping shoulders, now a hopeless raising and dropping of her long oval hand, now, as she walked, that unconscious pointing of her left foot. He wearied of thinking of her ; wearied of his question. There was no healing in this prison-house of silence : he could only beat his thoughts against the walls : “ Mary. . . . Mary. . . . Mary. . . .” Sometimes he heard himself uttering this aloud.

She had emptied all things in the world of interest. Books—he could not read them ; men friends—doubtless he would like them again one day ; women—all the power of their beauty was taken from them. They could not even draw his eyes. And places which memory had bathed in a romantic light because he had loved in them—it was rather sad to think that they could mean so little to him now. The lake of Grandel-mere where he had drifted under the banks with Sybil Chandry ; the lanes by Stratton Lye where he had walked with his thoughts of Frank Doyly ; the crown of Wolstonbury where he had sat and talked with Jill—what were these places to-day ? A sheet of water reflecting pine trees, a leafy road in Sussex, a hill-top in the loneliness of the sky ; not much more. One day would the crown of Leith Hill be no more than these ? Sybil : What was she to him now ? A sentimental memory ; he could bear to hear that she was dead. And Frank Doyly, who *was* dead—only to be remembered at such times as these !

Oh, no : it must not be thus with Mary. He would not let it be. He would vow now that no one else should come into his future and disperse the beauty from the summit of Leith Hill.

What if people knew one’s thoughts ? They would ridicule and despise him ; and yet, one and all, they indulged the same. Like him, they would think as they tossed an unread book on to a chair, “ If the book falls on the seat and stays there, all will be well ; if it slides to the ground, then——” and, did it show a sign of slipping to the ground, they would jump up and stop it. Nowadays hardly a match flew from his hand to the fireplace without the thought accompanying it : “ If it lies on the grating all will be well ; if it slips through, I am done for.” Mary hid behind the corner of every thought,

every action, every sight, and generally revealed her presence before one thought-series gave place to the next. He might escape into lively gossip or intellectual debate, but soon he would remember the prison walls; and they would close upon him again, so that his heart, while his lips gossiped, would be crying, "Mary. . . . Mary."

After twelve days a letter came from Mary; and the sight of her handwriting drove him into the privacy of his study. As he tore the envelope he told himself to expect little, and so to cheat disappointment of its mark. And this is what he read:

"I have just got the book and thank you a thousand times. I shall like it so much better because it is your copy. I am having an absolutely gorgeous time with Daddy and I think he is quite happy too. Still, I shall be glad when the time comes to turn back to England. I love England best—ever so much best."

"Yours rather affectionately,

"Mary Leith."

"P.S.—Why do you spoil me so!!"

That was all: he had had his letter and read it, and known a moment of joy; and now the walls of silence were around him again.

During the next days, as he paced the cell, he would run over and over that letter (he knew it by heart), draining it for some evidence of love. She had written at once . . . she had liked the book better because it was his . . . she was wanting to come back to England. . . . But how could she be having "an absolutely gorgeous time," when he was suffering like this? And the letter was so brief! Surely if her mind was wrapped up to him, she would be compelled to write at length for her own relief. . . .

That was what *he* did. He sat down and wrote at unjustifiable length to her; and the creation of this letter was much easier, and much more joyous, than was the creation of a chapter for his book, these days. When he was writing a book, emotion might have to be whipped up; when he was writing to Mary, it drove him. He built up a merry, bantering letter largely out of her own favourite words and phrases. "Listen: you will kindly write in great detail next time, Mary Leith, and not be so dumb. Yes, that'll be just marvellous."

The letter posted, there was nothing but days of silence and

waiting. Days of everlasting calculation: "She must have got it on Monday, or, at the latest, Tuesday. If she really cares for me she will answer the same night. That means I should get her answer on Thursday—or Friday, at the latest." Though he did not believe that he would be disappointed, he steadied himself against disappointment, should Friday pass with no letter, or the letter come and be cold. But in imagination he suffered the pain of that disappointment, and it was so crushing, so sickening; it so sank the heart and tightened the head that he found himself exclaiming, "Oh, to be quit of all this, and free again!" but, even as he said it, his whole being rose up and denied this denial. He had wanted all this; and he had got it; and, suffering it, he was exultantly happy.

Her beloved handwriting dropped from the letter-box to the floor on the Thursday night—ah, good! then something had compelled her to answer at once. He hurried into his room and drank the letter there. It was very brief—damnably brief—and damnably impudent—but——!

"This is another short letter, and purposely so, to show you that I am not in the least moved by your rebukes and have no intention of obeying you—ever, but as a matter of fact, there's no sense in writing, anyway, as I shall be back in five days after you get this, and you will kindly listen to me while I tell you absolutely everything in great detail. Oh, how 'jolly'—your English word and so stupid! We've had a 'topping' time. 'Topping'—did you ever hear anything so dumb?—Yours indignantly, but on the whole with some love, Mary."

Next morning Mr. Broadley met him in the High Street and stopped him. "Ah, O'Grogan, the very man, the very man! I wanted to get in touch with you."

"Yes, Vicar?"

And Tony looked inquiringly into the coarse, round face. But he was not searching there for the Vicar's instructions; he was seeing the heavy cheeks, the sagged pouches under the eyes, the sparse and languid hair; and receiving another instruction.

"It's about next Sunday, O'Grogan. I shall want you to address the Booksellers' Conference Service, when the Mayor'll be there. You'll be the right man for that!"

"Right-ho, Vicar!"

But the real message that Tony had received from

Mr. Broadley was, "I am heavy, coarse, and over sixty, and my time for love and romance is past."

"I should have liked to address the Conference Service myself," explained the Vicar, "but I've—I've been invited to preach in the Cathedral that day, and I feel I ought to give it the precedence, don't you think so?"

"Certainly. I'll look after the Booksellers," answered Tony.

But his real answer was, "I am forty this year; and I am not going on into middle age without taking another chance of love."

"You see," continued the Vicar, "it's the sudden death of Prebendary Cowper that has done this. They wanted to know if I would take his place."

"Oho, Vicar!"—Mary was his last chance. It was her or none. He was not going through this anguish again, for it burnt too deep. "Does that mean they are going to give you his stall?"—Oh, yes, take her, perhaps for always, perhaps for only a little while; but salve *something* with Mary. His marriage was unreal, and his churchmanship was unreal, and life was slipping by. Salve something rich and memorable, while there was time——

"I don't know about that. I'm not thinking about that," said the Vicar—"My dear man, what a genial liar you are!"—but I feel that, if they're in a difficulty I ought to step into the breach. I wouldn't have consented if I hadn't thought you were precisely the man for the Booksellers."

Perhaps for always? Why not? If she would take him on those terms, he might break with everything and marry her. One could live but once; and at sixty he wasn't going to look back on a life gone sterile for want of courage——

"Oh, I'll talk to the Booksellers all right."

—Oh, yes, yes. For always, if she would have him. He was not going to take Mary and squander her as his mistress of a year. He had never wanted that. It was never her body he had wanted so much as her love. Strange; he had always been like that; had always wanted to receive an adoration, and to give it; with but secondary thoughts of physical pleasure. Her kisses and her embrace would be very lovely, but chiefly for their meaning——

"Yes, but don't go giving them one of your provocative sermons, my boy. Remember Scrase'll be there, and it's no

use ruffling him unnecessarily. You won't change him now ; and he's one of the best, really."

"I'll be gentle, Vicar. I'm very fond of the old man."

What a triumph for the Scrases and all his other critics if he broke with everything and married Mary ! But what would he care ? They could have their little triumph, poor dull souls, and he would have life, while there was time——

"Very good ; that's settled, is it, O'Grogan ?"

"Yes, Vicar."

"Right, then. Good-bye."

And an ageing man, whose day was much too late for love, hurried away towards the only ambition that was left to him ; while Tony, whose day was turning the meridian, walked in the breathless companionship of a new idea. "Why not ? Why not ? It might be inconceivably beautiful. It is something that a few people have found, but I have never known."

PART III

CHAPTER I

THE BEECHWOOD UNDER WOLSTONBURY

THERE is a beechwood under Wolstonbury, resting against the lower slope of the great down. In summer its tilted floor is a lake of dog's-mercury, on which the sun, spearing through the branches, lays sheets and marges of golden light. A pathway winds through it, climbing on shelves to the uppermost trees and on to the wide empty turf of the down. At places the knuckled roots of the beeches make the path a stairway of broad steps, and you stride from one step to another, arousing a whisper among the dead leaves. Shrubs of thorn and maple and guelder-rose flank the stairway, and tangled hazel bushes, and clumps of the wayfaring tree.

The afternoon was dropping its gold on the lake of dog's-mercury when Antony O'Grogan and Mary Leith came into the wood and wandered slowly up the steep path. To help her up the path he put his arm through hers, gently propelling her by the shoulder; and she, as the darkness of the trees fell around them, gathered his fingers and laced them through her own, as her fashion was. They were not talking much: sometimes he pointed to the long-aged stems of traveller's-joy which twisted and festooned themselves among the trees, thick as quayside ropes; sometimes he named the flowers and herbs around them; rock-roses and fig-wort and spindleberry, and the green liver-wort on the boles of the beeches. Once he halted and picked a leaf from a shrub which had brushed his arm.

"Maple, my dear," he said. "*Your* leaf."

"Why?"

"Canada's leaf, isn't it?"

"Oh, yes, of course."

She took it with her unoccupied hand, and kept it dangling at her side.

The path becoming steeper, he withdrew his arm from her elbow and put it against her waist to help her upward; and she, a few minutes after, allowed her arm to find its way around his waist. Delight pierced him, and he pressed her against his side; and she, for a second, returned the pressure.

They left the path, and, breaking through the trees and shrubs, clambered down to the hollow, and on to the ankle-deep carpet of dog's-mercury leaves. He halted on the slope under the greatest of the beech trees.

"Here we'll sit," said he.

"Yes. I feel so tired. . . . I don't know why."

So they sat—or lay, rather—in the dark green leaves which lifted around their weight to the level of their breasts. Tony, turning a glance towards Mary, saw her as if floating in a sea of leaves.

"Isn't it still, Mary?"

"Yes."

"Not a bird singing anywhere."

"And not a breath of wind."

He looked about him. He saw the sunlight glinting on the liver-wort which greened the boles; and, below them, beyond the last of the trees, the spread of an oat-field which was the colour of a flushed apricot, under the sun. Turning his face round and up, he saw above the branches the bare turf climbing to the crown of Wolstonbury. And that other contemplative Tony, who could always stand aside and watch the active Tony, remembered instantly the long talk on Wolstonbury's top with Jill Daubeney twelve years before. He had stuttered then his newest creed: that a man must climb out of the lushness of personal needs up to the bare, bleak beauty of wide, impersonal things. Out of the woods and gardens, and up to where the hills were bare. It was just after his love for Honor had collapsed; and just before the war broke. "We'll to the woods no more, *les lauriers sont coupés*." That was twelve years before, and here he was to-day, not on the summit of Wolstonbury, but in the shimmering wood at its foot. With Mary lying beside him, and a white delight of anticipation emptying all his body.

"Only three o'clock, Mary. We might spend an hour here, or even two—before going back to the car."

"Oh, do let's. It's all so peaceful."

Her arm lay between them, its hand stroking the leaves. Tony sat up and idly pulled a leaf to pieces. Then, without looking at her, he felt for her hand and laid his own upon it.

"Mary, may I tell you something?"

She did not answer.

"Mary, have you long ago guessed that I love you?"

Perhaps she started, but she said nothing: only her hand turned over and closed round his.

"My dear, I think I loved you the first time I saw you—no, don't let me tell any lies. I nearly fell in love with you then, but I forgot you shamefully soon. I love you now."

She was staring ahead of her, as he turned to her with the question, "Mary, what do you feel for me? Do you love me?" Her lips moved to speak, but did not; and his heart, unwarrantably, began to founder. It began to beat with fright.

"I don't know," she said at last. "I love being with you I love it more than I can say."

But this was not enough to salve his happiness: it hung between living and dying till she, looking up at his averted face and feeling for his need, said quickly:

"I am happy when I am with you . . . and so unhappy when I am away from you."

This should have been enough for any man; and Tony's heart did indeed leap upward into the delight of assurance; but he was of the kind that could not be content with less than the perfect word, and to hint that he needed more, he began to draw his hand sadly away. At once she closed on it and held it tight.

"Oh, yes, yes. . . . Of course I do. . . . I know it."

Neither spoke nor moved. Mary sighed deeply.

"What am I to do, Mary? Am I to leave you, and see you no more after to-day——?"

"Oh, no, no," she pleaded, in a sudden fear. "I want to be with you a little longer. I can't give you up—yet. . . ."

He stole his arm around her shoulders, and for a long minute stared down into her face which was staring back, rather dazed, into his. He looked at her lips which in a moment he would kiss. Then he drew her towards him, and nothing existed except the pressure of their lips, from which neither could draw

away. Soon he felt that her hand was stroking his hair, and, in answer, he forced her lips apart and drew her willing body tighter against him.

With a sigh he withdrew at last from that first embrace, and laid her back in the leaves, that he might study the beauty of her face and try, with whimsical eyes, to believe. . . . And she smiled at him for this humorous survey. Then quietly, just gratefully, he kissed everything about her face that he had loved : the brown eyes, the full but narrow cheeks, the white forehead, and the black silk hair. And he drew a finger along her lips. She smiled again, at this treatment, and he laid a hand gently on the rise of one of her breasts. She placed both her own hands over this resting hand of his and pressed it closer.

" Mary, I love you."

" And I you . . . Tony."

" Mary, I want to be loyal to this love."

" What do you mean, dear ?"

He picked a leaf to pieces without answering.

" Tony : tell me what you meant when you said that ?"

" That I am ready to come to you."

" Ah, but——"

" Ah, but what, Mary ?"

" But one stops loving. *You* know that."

" Yes . . . sometimes one does."

" Well, then—— ?"

" But Mary : I can't feel—at present—that I should ever do that with you. I would study to keep this love. God, I wouldn't *dare* to lose it. That would be *too* awful ! And it seems to me different from anything I've felt before. I have never felt such an amazing tenderness for anyone. I suppose it's due to my great age."

She frowned her humorous impatience with him, and one eyebrow tilted a little higher than the other. " Don't be so dumb !"

" Listen ! That *is* a bird singing somewhere. Do you hear it ? *There !*"

" Yes, what is it ?"

" Blackcap or whitethroat."

" And there are others too. . . . Gosh, have they been singing all the time ?"

"I suppose so. That's a yellow-hammer right above us. Mary, if we really love each other, shouldn't we have the courage to——"

"Oh, but I might fail you, I might fail you! If you gave up everything for me, I should be so terrified of failing you." She gazed down through the branches at the oat-field, where a light breeze ran, making the tint of the oats paler as it passed.

"How could you fail me?"

"I am rather stupid, really. You don't know me. Think of all your bright and clever friends, and how ashamed you'd be of me—once you had stopped loving me like this."

"Mary Leith, you lie! You lie every way. You are amazingly intelligent. Sometimes I suspect that you will be brilliant one day. And how could I ever be ashamed of anything so beautiful as you?"

"I am not beautiful. A passable face, perhaps, but I've got no figure."

"You are very beautiful. I do not propose to argue with you about it."

"Well, then, I am often moody and discontented. And I am marvellously selfish sometimes."

"Mary Leith, you are *not*!"

"I *am*, I tell you!" Once again she frowned her humorous impatience, but her eyes were still on the oat-field. "I have known this Mary Leith of yours for twenty years, and I know she's a thoroughly commonplace little slut, really."

"She is easily the most loving and delightful child I have ever known."

"Ah, but she's been on her best behaviour with you. You should see her sometimes. Sometimes I have nothing but contempt for her, she seems so utterly selfish."

"Well, then, she *is*, sometimes. We all are."

"She would be all right as long as she went on loving you—but oh, supposing I stopped loving you!" Now her eyes were on him. "I don't feel as if I ever could, but oh—how does one *know*? How does one *know*?"

"Dearest, I should make it the task of my life to hold your love, and to keep my love for you. Mary, haven't I learned that there's one thing in the world better worth striving for than anything else? If I join my life with yours, I'm going to build the only thing worth having. I'm not going to fail, and I'm not going to let you fail."

"Tony! . . ."

He took her into his arms, that he might receive her gratitude for this; and after they had kissed, looked down into her face and asked, "What do you say then, Mary?"

"Oh, don't ask me to say anything now, Tony. I can't."

"Shall we just wait then, my dear? Shall we just see as much of each other as possible, and wait and hope?"

"But is it right? Is it right?"

"Listen, Mary." Holding her there and fixing her eyes, he quoted:

"He looked at her as a lover can,
She looked at him as one who awakes:
The Past was a sleep, and her life began.

Is that true, Mary?"

"Oh, yes . . .! So true!"

"So true for me, too. Are we, then, to smother life, and turn away from it?"

"But isn't that the old, old excuse for doing wrong?"

"Or for doing right. Who knows?"

"No . . . wrong . . . wrong. . . ."

"Mary, do you really think that?"

"Yes . . . at least, I think I do. . . ."

"Then I must go from you, of course——" he began to release her—"and to-day. . . . It is over, Mary."

"Oh, no, no! No, don't go. Let us wait and see—just for a little. I can't give you up—not yet."

They were clasped in each other's arms again, and her passion rose to compete with his. She, no less than he, forced the lips on hers apart to find a deeper and deeper kiss. It was while they swayed in this rivalry that the sound of voices cut them apart. Voices on the pathway above them, and the laugh, unmistakable, of those who have surprised two lovers at their sport. Tony played guiltily with the leaves, and Mary lay back on an elbow, trembling. The voices and the footsteps passed up the track, and out of hearing.

"Tony, could they have recognized you?"

"Me? Of course not, dearest."

"But I could swear I heard your name. I heard the name O'Grogan."

"No, you're imagining it."

"But you used to live near here, didn't you?"

"Yes, but it's five long years since I was here. Come back to me."

And she came back into his embrace. Then tenderly he laid her down in the leaves, and his hand touched her arm and breast and knee. His frame was shaking as he stared down upon her face. And she stared up at him, and passed her hand over his hair and round his neck; or stroked his forehead to smooth a wrinkle away, while she smiled. A speck fell from a branch on to her face, and he brushed it away, smiling too. Then he lay down and held her close, for a long hour, till a tiredness drained all his body—an exhaustion—even a weariness with love. Such a tiredness that his body might have been in the first threat of a fever; it was cold and trembling. He sat up and rested his elbows on his knees, while she lay in the leaves beside him, white and tired too.

"Come," he said, standing up. "We had better go." He looked behind. "I must remember this exact spot. Let's see; the largest of the beech-trunks, with three unhappy little yews around. Heaven knows: I may come back here one day, a sentimental ghost. . . ."

She was standing now, and he took her to him. "My beloved!"

"My dearest!"

After the kiss, Mary turned with a sigh and toiled ahead of him up the slope. Her figure sagged a little; and just for that second she looked unlike any Mary he had known. Her face was out of view, and her body was spoiled by its drooping. For that second—for a horrid moment of time, not two heart-beats long, the thought flashed in him: "Perhaps, after all, I don't love her enough. Perhaps it will be best to enjoy her for a little and lose her, and escape the strain of breaking with the past." No other than Tony, it may be, would have heard this tiny thought that flashed in his weariness; but him it sickened. "Oh, no! Never let me hurt you, Mary. I love you as I've never loved anyone else before. I want only to give you everything." And he hurried to where she walked, and put an arm around her to help her up the slope. She leaned against him; and they went out of the wood, quietly and almost sadly.

CHAPTER II

A FOLDER THROUGH THE POST

THERE was a deep-rooted humility in Tony which was amazed, sometimes, that anyone so beautiful as Mary could love him. She was one, surely, who could pick and choose among men, and she chose to give her love to him, and to give it with a completeness that filled up the most extravagant of his dreams. He had moments when this tremendous fact seemed almost incredible—but there it stood, stubborn before his eyes.

And if Tony was humble, Mary was more than humble; she had an excessive distrust of herself. She told him that she would sit for hours and hours, trying to understand why he—he of all people—should love her. She told him that for two days after the beechwood she had gone about her business stupefied; seeing nothing and hearing nothing, and, in short, behaving like a perfect fool. And he kissed her for her folly.

She bewildered him: walking at his side, she blent all the sparkle, the diffidence, the simple adoration of a child; in his arms she shed all this, and was an impassioned woman. They had found a cave in a garden by the Thames—a cave whose walls were shrubbery and whose roof was the spread of a sycamore tree—and here they would enjoy long days of companionship. On entering it, he would stand before her, smile, and draw her to him for an inaugural kiss; and she would come with her eyes closed, her head thrown back for the alighting of his kiss, and all of her body that was below the grasp of his arm pressed forward against him. Her lips would move as if she smiled in her sleep.

One day, this inaugural matter performed, he sat down on the grass and put out his arms for her. But she stood above him with her hat in her hand; and suddenly tossed back her hair and said, "Oh, I could roar!"

"Do, my child."

"I'm so happy. So happy."

"Come."

"No." She sat abruptly at his side and stretched her legs before her, foot over foot. "Tell me a story."

"Good God!"

"Yes, anything you like. I am in the mood for a good long story."

"Story! I can't tell stories!"

"Yes, you can. It's your business, isn't it?"

"Very good, lady. Very good, then; you shall have it." And after pretending to profound thought, he began. In correct professional style he began with a description of the *mise en scène*. This, it seemed, was a city of towering white palaces and most extraordinary dins; and it was called New York. Then he described a girl who dwelt in this city; and while painting her beauty he rose to heights of very great eloquence. Her eyes, he explained, were normally of a velvety brown but would change sometimes into a dark glinting blue, like a pool beneath cypress trees——

"Not so much description," Mary interrupted.

"The description of the heroine is of paramount importance," said Tony. "Well, it chanced that there arrived in the same city a windy and tedious Lecturer, as ugly as sin itself. And one morning when he was sated with life, and very lonely, he went to the doors of the palace where he was resting—a grotesque, overheated place—and whom should he see on the marble steps, like the promise of better things—whom should he see, I say——?"

Mary broke in:

"Now I'll continue that story. You're telling it badly. There was once in the City of New York a girl of very usual face and very ordinary parts. I don't know what parts are, but hers were ordinary. She was vain and selfish, and not half as pretty as she liked to think herself. In intelligence she was wanting. And one day she had occasion to go to a hotel to look after a male creature, and she dressed herself in a blue dress which she imagined became her well——"

"It did——"

"Yes; so this vain woman whom we shall hereinafter refer to as——"

"The Radiant Vision," suggested Tony.

"Don't keep interrupting—whom we shall hereinafter refer to as The Slut—she went to the hotel, and while she stood on the steps looking through the glass doors and pretending not to, she saw approaching the Assemblance of a Man. And it seemed to her an agreeable sight. And this—this Being invited her to drive him about the city. So she hurried home, but did not get her car straight away, but ran up to her room, and there, like the cunning Slut she was, she tired her hair and powdered her nose and gave her face some colour, of which, by nature, she had none, and arranged her dress till it liked her; and when she had fully assembled herself, she hurried back with the car to the hotel that she might see again the afore-mentioned Being. And, sure enough, there he was, standing behind the glass doors, looking miserable and perfectly sweet."

"On the contrary," said Tony, "he was feeling amazingly happy, and wondering why."

"Well, anyhow, they drove away—they drove and drove like a pair of idiots, and in the course of the drive the Being asked her to kiss him, and the Slut refused; though—again, dear reader, we remind you that she was thoroughly deceitful—though, to tell the truth, there was nothing she would have liked better——"

"Ah, bless you!" exclaimed Tony. And he took her there and then and kissed her.

That kiss drove the child out of her. In both of them frivolity flared up into passion. The sweat broke on his brow as he drank of her rich offering; and again and again he brushed the moisture from him, but once a drop fell on to her face, and as he was about to wipe it, in distress, away, she sighed, "Don't. I love it." When they were sated with loving—even repelled by it—they broke apart and exchanged it for the gay companionship of friends. Mary jumped up, and smoothed her crumpled frock, and moaned for her dishevelled hair. She let it fall and began to comb its wildness away, but he cried, "Stop! You lovely hamadryad."

"What on earth's that?"

"A nymph of the trees with wild hair. Leave it."

She left it as it was; and they sat and talked of her school, her home and her friends, till a wave of love lifted them out of the trough of mere happy companionship, and they were seeking ecstasy again.

That was the sparkling Mary, and the ardent Mary. There was also a serious child in her, who pleased him no less. More, probably, when, alone in his study, he was recalling her manners and her words. This serious child would throw up out of her pensiveness quick, sudden, unrelated sentences which surprised him, because they seemed to spring from wells deeper than any she was conscious of, or he had suspected. So often in their chatter together she would cap some commonplace sentence of his with a nobler sentence of her own! Once she was depreciating herself in her usual fashion, knitting her brows and telling the distance, "No, I don't understand it. That you should love me, who am so stupid, when you must meet lots of other women who have beauty and brains and everything that makes attractiveness"—she shook her head. "I just think and think about it, and I don't understand it."

"My dear," he said, "if only you *could* understand! Why, sometimes I make up my mind that I must begin straightaway to make myself worthy of you, in case one day . . ."

"Ah, but even if nothing comes of all this," she answered quickly, picking a long grass, "it did happen, didn't it? And I've made up my mind that, even if I never have you, I'm going to try to be worthy of what has been. I never expected anything like this."

If ever Antony O'Grogan loved Mary Leith perfectly, he loved her as she said that.

"Tell me . . ." she began one day, and hesitated.

"Tell you what?" he encouraged.

Her mouth pursed up with the difficulty of speech, and a smile broke it apart. Tony watched with delight those movements of her mouth. They were lying side by side in a punt which he had moored behind an island of the Thames. Between the trees of the island he could see the stretch of Ham Fields. To their left lay Strawberry Vale.

"Tell me," she began again—"you are very wise——"

"No," he protested; "I am beginning to wonder if I understand anything at all."

"You are very clever indeed, and you know it. Tell me . . . oh, lord 'a' mercy, isn't it difficult?"

She sat upright so as to be able, by stern concentration, to come at this matter; and Tony, lolling on the cushions and waiting for it, became more fully aware of her clothes—a broad-brimmed panama hat, a sleeveless frock of white silk

with a a belt of scarlet leather, flesh-coloured stockings, and white sandals. Himself was in tennis flannels and a white cardigan. She removed the panama hat, patted her hair into place, and turned to him with the shy twisted smile at her mouth and an ashamed inquiry in her lifted eyebrows.

"Tell me: is it possible to start training one's taste for art and books and all that, so late as twenty-one?"

"One is very near the end at such an age," chaffed Tony. "The attempt seems hardly worth while."

"No, don't laugh at me," she begged. "I'm very serious about all this. I've got it into my head that I want to start at once learning all about everything on earth."

"Is that all? Why be content with so little?"

"Oh, do be quiet! I want to make a confession. Listen: when you were talking about architecture in Westminster Abbey and about geology on Leith Hill, I was interested, of course, but only because I liked to hear your voice, and not—if you understand—because the subjects interested me. I longed for you to leave them and go on talking about yourself. And now that seems to me rather silly."

"Unpardonably silly."

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"Yes; and I'm quite different now. Oh, I've learned such a lot about myself in the last few days—since——"

"Since when?"

"Since that day in the beechwood. I think—if you understand—that it almost frightened me into a sight of myself—and I suddenly wanted to be big enough for you. I don't suppose I shall ever have you—my common sense just cries to me that I never shall—but there's no harm in playing a little game of 'Let's pretend,' is there?"

Again she turned on him the inquiring eyebrows, but he was too moved to answer.

"I call it my game of 'If only!' 'If only it might have been . . .' and I like to think that I shouldn't have failed you at any point. I've only just seen that, in the past, all my friends who have taken me to dances have really thought of me as no more than a plaything to whom they could talk their silly flirtatious stuff——"

"Damn them, damn them, damn them," muttered Tony.

"Yes—and oh, it's been so marvellous the way you've poured out to me all the ideas that interest you. You stutter and get excited and all worked up. And you look so sweet!

I never love you quite so much as when you're doing that. And I can never think of any bright answers for you. It's so sad! Listen: shall I tell you—since I'm being bold and brazen this afternoon—that all the time you're doing that, I'm saying to myself, 'Oh, you dear thing! I want to be with you always, and do everything for you.'"

Mary, as she said this, pulled a stalk from the bank and played with it; and Tony laid a grateful hand over hers.

"And now," she pursued, "you've got to answer this: can one change one's moral character at twenty-one?"

"Is yours so bad?"

"No—not *bad*. But not good enough. Not—" her head went down over the stalk—"now that this has happened. I think I'm shallow and light and selfish."

"Shallow! Shallow!" murmured Tony, amazed at her inability to understand herself. "And selfish! *Selfish*, said she!"

"Yes, I *am* selfish. For instance, I oughtn't to be doing with you—what I am doing now. I ought to have the courage to give you up for—for others' sake. But I just haven't got it at present."

"Nor I," said Tony; and added, "Or is the courage wanted to go on?"

Mary shook her head many times, over the stalk which she was shaping into knots.

"Tell me another thing," she asked. "I sometimes wonder if I could love you so tremendously if you weren't so much older than me. Sometimes the wonder of it seems to be that anyone seventeen years older than I am, and ever so much cleverer, should care to come into my arms and be able to get something from me. Is that sense?"

"My dear," answered Tony, "if it's wonderful for you, isn't it a hundred times more wonderful for me? Have you ever thought what it means to a disgruntled old boor——"

"Ah, don't be silly," whispered Mary—

"—to a tired, middle-aged man when he finds that a child is ready to take him into her embrace and bear with him and comfort him——?"

Now Mary laid her hand on his.

They spoke but little after that. It was late afternoon, and the falling sun seemed to command a silence. They idled with the grasses at their side, or pulled down the leaves from an

overhanging bough. The evening deepened, and a shiver of wind blew along the water. Mary sank from it into her cushions.

"Cold?" he asked.

"It's turned a little cold," she allowed.

He stood up and, removing his white woollen coat, put it around her shoulders, slipping her bare arms into its long sleeves. Then he dragged the punt-pole from its deep bite in the river's bed.

"Home now."

Gently he propelled the punt towards its home. Ham Fields—Eel Pie Island—Old Richmond: they reminded him of an evening, far in the past, when he rowed Peggy down this stretch of the river, after sailing up it at noon. This evening, as then, the houses on the eastern bank, staring into the sun's face, were luminous themselves and threw long twinkling reflections on the water; while the sun-rays, on the opposite bank, took stealthy cover and peeped from the undergrowth and the willows. More than twenty years had gone since that day, and yet he felt little different from the boy of sixteen who had rowed Peggy home. He had been thinking then, he remembered, that a day would come when he would row, not a sister, but a lover home through an evening light; and he had plied his oars very quietly, happy with this thought.

This evening he thrust with his pole very quietly, and drew it wet through his fingers, recalling the things that Mary had said. "I want to be with you always, and do everything for you." Never again would he find so dear a nature.

In these first days she became a craving, like the craving for a drug. After a day of happiness with her, he would return home and enjoy one day of satisfied thoughts; and then, with the next morning, the hunger was restive again. Where was she now; what was she doing at this minute?—oh, this undefeatable wall of silence! The hunger, swelling, would demand its relief, and he found it in the writing of a long, passionate letter to her. The letter written, he was calm again; it had acted like a sex relief.

And yet that other watching Tony could worry over a colour of cruelty he saw in his tenderness. Why was he driven always

to heighten her love by fanning it with little winds of jealousy and doubt? Why must he so often speak of other women whom he had met since last with her? Why would he even hurt her, sometimes, by talk of Honor and her goodness as a wife? Why did he know, quite surely, that he would hold back from nothing which would fix her love for ever, even though her life were marred thereby?

How could he have done—this he was to ask himself till the end of his days—that which he did now?

A long bulky envelope, addressed in Peggy's hand, lay on Honor's plate. She broke it open, and something stiff, folded, and highly coloured fell to the table. She read the letter, examined the folder, and cried:

"Oh, Tony, do let's, do let's! We must. I've wanted to do it all my life."

The pitiableness of her peace! She suspected nothing and was happy; she was content, as she had been for many years, with their low-lying plain of friendship. For weeks his kiss and his words of endearment had been no more than those of a brother; and she had not even noticed this. And here this morning, over the friendly gossip of the breakfast table, she was showing him Peggy's letter, and the folding prospectus, which it had enclosed, of a cruise in the Norwegian fjords.

"We *must* do it, Tony. We can afford these things now. Oh, isn't it nice to have some money at last?"

He took the folder, and, opening it out, studied its pictures of austere cliffs whose ravines and gorges broke down to the water. Gallipoli. But these gorges were much steeper and darker than the Gallipoli gorges. How remote Gallipoli was! How dimmed and grey! He had lived in its ravines, while two nations crumbled their edges away in their friction together, and the fall of his friends was a daily drama; and yet Gallipoli had not disturbed him as Mary had done. It had thrilled him, but it had remained outside and around him; only in moments of fear for himself had it come within. God, what egotists men were! That the reciprocal slaughter of two peoples should affect one less than a dark-eyed girl!

"Oh, do say yes!" Honor was pleading. "You know you're as keen on it as I am!"

And yet he had been tremendously alive on Gallipoli. Curious how one could look back over life and distinguish three periods of high-powered living: when one was fighting,

when one was creating, and when one was loving. And the last the vividest of the three!

"Well, what's the decision?" asked Honor.

Oh, she thought he was contemplating a holiday in the Norwegian fjords. He made a humorous grimace for her amusement, and contemplated it.

"Right-ho, my dear. We'll go."

The debate in his head had not been long. Pity had touched Conscience on the elbow, and Conscience had stood upright and bidden him give Honor all he could. And now that Conscience had sat down, some less altruistic debaters were saying a few words in support of his decision. You would have to go somewhere for a holiday, said one, and this trip will take only three weeks instead of five; you will be able to come back quickly to Mary——

"Tony, do you mean it? You don't! You can't!"

"I do. Fix it up with Peggy."—It will be a placid holiday, said another, in which you can dream all day on the ship's rail while romantic scenery gives poignance to your dream, and no one remarks your quietness.

"Oh, Tony, how absolutely gorgeous!"

He smiled at her excitement like a tolerant father.—It will be nice to have Peggy there, said a third, even though it means Michael Saffery too. Who knows: one might, under the stars, tell Peggy all about it. She would be sympathetic as no one else. O Heaven, what a relief it would be!

And Honor jumped up and did what she had not done for many a year: she flung her arms around him and kissed his forehead. He patted her back, while a shudder passed through him. Then he kissed her contritely. And at the same moment the loathliest debater of all spoke: "Three weeks' absence from Mary will leave her pining and unhappy, and she will learn what her need of you is. This will deepen her love."

"But, Honor, you must keep Father Michael all to yourself—

'I do not love old Michael well,
The reason why I cannot tell'——"

"That'll be all right, Tony. I'll take the Father, and you can find a daughter to flirt with."

And Honor had slipped away, to write at once to Peggy.

Yes, Michael Saffery was a flaw. Lighting an after-breakfast pipe, Tony reviewed the hidden hostility that always played

between Father Michael and him. In what had this singular growth germinated? Michael had deceived Peggy, of course, but not deliberately; he had deceived her with his long black cassock, his ascetic face and his earnest sermons; and Peggy had not learned till she married him that, inside this really magnificent character-study of a High Church priest, there lived a lazy, drifting and defeated man. . . . But Michael had really loved Peggy when he married her; and doubtless he had made a resolution to be better and more worthy of her; but had had no strength to continue the fight. "Worthy of her!" Would *he*, if ever he married Mary, backslide like this and fail her? Oh, no; he would be different from other men. . . . Wait: a comforting thought: Michael had been more than twenty years older than Peggy when he married her; and no one had thought it remarkable.

But let's get back to the hostility. Then Michael had quickly guessed that his young brother-in-law was seeing through his black cassock to the decay inside; and he had probably suspected that Peggy confided in her favourite brother; and so the veiled hostility had begun. One knew so well that at Diocesan Conferences Father Michael, of Southend, would shake hands with Alderman Scrase, of Thamesmouth, and join him in condemning "young brother-in-law's" latest absurdity. "Young Antony seems to think that he's the only parson who went to the war and thought about it. *I* was at the war too, but I don't make a song about it. Why can't he stick to his job as a priest instead of writing those cheap books?" Oh, Michael was priestly and orthodox enough: he would battle for his High Church faith with all the hot enthusiasm of one who believed none of it. Very jealous of his young brother-in-law's success—that was the plain truth of the matter. Oh, he was a poor creature, and his hostility was an ill-favoured growth. One much preferred the hostility of Alderman Scrase, which sprang from a soil one could honour.

By the evening of that day Honor, restless with delight, had booked a cabin for her husband and herself on the good ship *Sagaman*; and it was the next afternoon that Mr. Ronald B. Leith, Mary's father, came out from that retired place where most fathers rest and began to build up calamity.

Mr. Leith was a tall, square-shouldered, well-fleshed man, with that young, boyish face which seems to bloom everywhere

on the American continent. Looking at the round, fair face, one tried to imagine Mary's mother, from whom she must have drawn her dark oval beauty. It was a good-tempered face, on the whole, though self-assertiveness lingered in the down-drooping corners of the mouth. There was something of self-assertiveness about his grey clothes also: they were too strongly tailored; the shoulders too square and taut; the shirt too patterned; the lapels too smooth and ironed; the trousers too full and much too perfectly valeted. As for his brown shoes, they shone with the light of the new world.

Mr. Leith liked Mary's friend: "this parson-author of yours, Mary, my girl." He would declare that O'Grogan was a decent sort of guy, with more intelligence than most parsons and twice as much humour (for Mr. Leith conceived himself an expert in the practice and appreciation of humour). He would say, "Bring him along when you've done with him, Mary. I like his talk. He is one who seems able to talk, like me, on most subjects under the sun; but see here, don't you go getting a 'pash' for him. No poppycock like that." Few things disturbed Tony more than the unsuspecting thanks which Mr. Leith would offer him for his kindness to Mary: "I think it extraordinarily kind of you to waste your time bear-leading this cub of mine. Yes, I'll say so. I don't know what she's done to deserve such interest, except to drive you all over New York one day, in my car, and with my gasolene."

"Petrol, dear," Mary would correct him. "'Petrol' in this country. Try and speak English."

A solicitor of Montreal who had "made his pile" and retired, Mr. Leith, having little else to interest him, was now an ardent politician; and he was always eager to expound to Tony his schemes for saving "the old country," cementing the Empire, and protecting Canada from Americanization. While he expatiated on minerals and oil, wheat pools and tariffs, Mary sat near by, not hearing a word, but either fixing her eyes on Tony's profile or letting them stray down the corridor of the hotel. Seldom had Tony produced anything quite so effortful as his replies to Mr. Leith's contentions; and yet his brain served him well, tossing up now a provocative, now a witty contribution to the tedious argument, while his thoughts sat with Mary in her chair. Surely this excellent Mr. Leith must sooner or later perceive his preoccupation and wonder at it; but no, Tony's brain kept his shop-window piled

high with social and political goods, so that no one could see that love sat brooding in the parlour behind.

The argument bristled on; and at last Mary drifted sadly away up the stairs of the hotel, while Tony, watching her furtively, obeyed his conscience and continued to discuss with Mr. Leith the religious issue in the Province of Quebec. Rather than offend Mr. Leith he continued it for half an hour before escaping in search of Mary.

And now, it being the day after the arrival of Peggy's letter, Tony was drinking tea with father and daughter in the Palm Court of the Ritz. He was often to see that Palm Court in after years (though he would avoid it if possible or pass it quickly), and to remember how Mr. Leith and Mary and he had sat round the table opposite the fountain, in the chairs of green brocade, and he had dropped the Norwegian folder into the talk. There were no others taking tea in the Palm Court, that hot July day. The palms strained upwards to the glass roof, the mirrors doubled them, the marble columns supported a proscenium arch like a theatre's; an orchestra in the corridor immediately below purveyed their sensuous airs; and all to emphasize, and do justice to, Mr. Leith, Mary Leith and Tony. Mr. Leith was in a square grey suit, as smooth as the irons of the Ritz would make it; and he seemed to fit in this marble setting very well. Mary was in a jumper suit of primrose silk, a small tight hat of primrose straw under which the black hair peeped, stockings of flesh silk and brown summer sandals. A necklace of graduated pearls rested on her open throat; and there could be no denying, this afternoon, that she was able to fit the marble pillars as well as the trees. Tony was in a smart brown suit and neat brown shoes, and may have looked to the gentlemen of the orchestra (not that they showed the smallest interest in him or in humanity at all) perfectly in place, but, as a matter of fact, he was feeling in complete unrelation to these hard, indifferent halls, much as he always felt when paired with a fashionable lady, of porcelain cheeks and scarlet lips, who got the glitter out of life and missed everything else. It was to fill a lacuna in the conversation that he mentioned the *Sagaman* and its forthcoming visit to the Norwegian fjords.

Mr. Leith listened to him for five minutes; then slapped a knee triumphantly and announced: "What a splendid idea! . . . Mary, do you think they'd put up with us too? Ask

your long-suffering friend whether he and his wife would tolerate a child like you for a fortnight. To say nothing of the old man."

Mary turned very white.

"Oh, no, Daddy. I—I don't want to go to Norway."

"But you'll just love it. You'll get a real kick out of it. Gee, that's fine! I'd been wondering what we'd do next. London'll be just impossible in August; and I'm getting sick to death of this pub. Will you and your wife mind if we steal your idea and come on the same boat? It'll be nice for Mary if she knows someone among the passengers."

"We should be delighted, I'm sure," said Tony. What else could he say?

"Well, that's fine! Mary, we'll 'phone 'em up right now and see if we can get reservations."

"Oh, Daddy," besought Mary. "Please . . . I don't want to leave London. I've been so happy here."

But Mr. Leith, coming from the American continent, was a man of character and knew it. He was quick in decision, and, having decided, he did not turn back, but got things done.

"Poppycock, child! You'll be still happier there. There's nothing quite like a sight-seeing cruise on a ship: no worries; no trains; darned good food; dancing every night—gee, it's a great notion you've given us, O'Grogan. Is it just you and your good lady that are going, or are you a party?"

"My sister and her husband are coming too."

"They'd rather be alone, Daddy," Mary suggested.

"Well, that's for him to say. Would you, sir? Would you rather keep it a family affair?"

"Not at all," stuttered Tony.

"No. I didn't believe it. . . . Besides, Mary, there'll be the whole darn ship; we can leave 'em alone sometimes. You'll find some young lad to flirt with, no doubt. . . . What sort of fellow's the husband, sir?"

"Another parson; but a good deal older."

"We shall be in holy company, Mary. Is he a broad-minded fellow like you?"

"I don't know about that. He's a very High Churchman."

"Ah, well, I like them. They're the lively lads who tell the Bishops where to get off—aren't they? They've generally got plenty of humour and good sense. Personally, I always get on very well with parsons. Any kids?"

"No. My sister's got a boy of fourteen, but he's going off on his own with some schoolfellows."

"Well, that's fine! Though, perhaps he'd have done for Mary here—two children together—ha, ha! What's the father's name?"

"'Father Saffery' he's always called, or 'Father Michael.' But actually he inherited his father's title some years ago."

"Did he?" Mr. Leith was impressed. "What is he, then? A real, live duke?"

"No; merely a baronet."

"Is he? Sir Something Saffery? So your sister's Lady Saffery?"

"Yes."

"Well, that's fine! They ought to be interesting people to meet. And then there's your wife. Yes, I shall like to meet your wife."

Mary at this point got up and went away. Tony's eyes, following her, saw that her face was grey with sickness.

Only when he sat in his train, returning to Thamesmouth, was he able to think clearly. Then he looked straight at this cloud which had come down upon them, quickly as a summer storm. Heavens! they must run different ways and shelter from it. Mary three weeks in the same narrow ship with him and his wife! At the same table day after day! On the same trips ashore. Honor, unsuspecting, giving her friendship to Mary! Mary, guilty, playing the hypocrite's rôle!

But now the cloud opened at a few points, and let tempting lights come through. Mary very close to him for three weeks, even though suffering. . . . Mary with him all his holiday instead of absent. . . . he snatching her for a few rapturous hours when no one was by. . . . ay, and she—here spoke the loathly debater again—she seeing him with other women and wanting him more. She seeing him with Honor, if it came to that! Why, three weeks of such pains and jealousies, and her love would be engraved deeper and deeper, never to be erased by time.

Which was what he wanted. Which was what he knew he must have. He knew that his want would prove stronger than his mercy. He knew, as the train rolled on, that he would put up no fight against the shaping events. And he alone could change their direction. Mary could not defeat her father. She might feign a sickness, but one could hear Mr. Leith banking

that sickness to his own account : " Seedy ? Nonsense, child. Why, then, a sea-voyage is the very thing for you. You'll be tickled to death with the mountains and the peasants, costumes and the midnight sun, and the whole darned outfit, once you've started." No, he alone could protect her, by withdrawing his party from the *Sagaman*. And he knew that he wouldn't do it, however much he might wish to. How could he turn away from three weeks' sojourning with Mary, when they might have so little time together. How could he deny himself this chance of fixing her love ? After all, would it be so wrong ? What was the difference between loving Mary in the same country as Honor, and in the same narrow ship ? It was mere casuistry to pretend a difference. One must not be conscience's slave. One must know what one wanted and bid boldly for it.

Three weeks with Mary by him ! When he got out of the train, his throat was alight—athirst for the *Sagaman's* decks.

CHAPTER III

ONE SPIT DOWN

TWO days later he was in a train that steamed from Hazebrouck to Ypres.

It was as crowded as any of the trains that had hurried reinforcements to the battles of September–October, '17; but its travellers were not soldiers to-day. Or if they were soldiers, they travelled in civilian suits with their uniforms folded in their brown leather cases. And they were men of importance, most in that train; men of wealth and age; not the ex-schoolboys herded for slaughter. Never had Tony kept such company in a train. Picking his way along the corridor, he was halted by a voice which, in easy prattle, dropped such tremendous sentences as "I said to Von Kluck in 1911" and "I put it to Kitchener early in '16." He looked through the window into a compartment where every seat was filled and half the floor, and stared at the speaker. He could not identify him, but he recognized the Minister of War sitting opposite him, and a most illustrious Merchant Prince at his side. Prince? Nay, this man, with his finger in every quarter of the globe, was an Emperor; and he sat there in an old black coat and a billycock hat. Huddled into a corner, and listening respectfully rather than speaking, was an Army Commander whose approach, ten years ago, would have fluttered terror in the hearts of brigadiers, colonels, and adjutants—not to speak of the smaller men. A great Bishop sat, deferential and benevolent, in another corner. An Under-Secretary, standing against the door, sustained his shaky position by a grip on the luggage rack; which prompted the Bishop to intrude the facetious but gentle witticism that, for the present, an Under-Secretary was without a seat. In a further compartment Tony recognized the high officials of the British Legion; and one of them informed him that Field-Marshal Lord Plumer himself

was on the train. In the compartment beyond he saw a British Ambassador; and he retreated at once.

There was no hope of finding a seat while Ministers hung on to the luggage rack, so he sat himself on his suit-case in the corridor. The man on the next bag stared out of the window at the Flemish fields and poured his reminiscences over anyone who would listen. He was of the loquacious unimaginative pattern who never stopped to consider that, in all probability, both the man on the right and the man on the left had visited the war too, and thought their experiences quite as notable as his own.

All were travelling to the Dedication of the Menin Arch. Yesterday *The Daily Sun*, the paper which had presented Antony O'Grogan to the world—Mr. Charles Arthur Hope pronouncing the few biographical and adulatory words—had invited him by 'phone and by wire to attend the great ceremony as its Special Correspondent; and Tony had been quite unable to refuse their offer of all expenses, a large fee, and an aide-de-camp who would go before him to Ypres, secure him a room there, where else no rooms could be got, meet him at the station, instruct him in its duties, and generally look after his comfort. And the idea had not been absent from his mind that he would like Mary to see all his greatness in the columns of *The Daily Sun*. He would spread before her there a fine peacock's tail.

It was a wistful, rather poignant, business to look out at the familiar sites, and see the light of Mary behind them all: the quaint streets of Poperinghe; the straight road from Poperinghe to Ypres; the red houses of Vlamertinghe; and the meadow where Padre Quickshaw had held his service before the battalion went forward to Railway Wood. All that was ten years ago, and Mary was only eleven then; a pig-tailed child at her school in New York; and he was a veteran of the regiment, wondering if he could give up his life to service after the war, and ah! thinking all the time of Honor. Pitiful old years before he had known Mary—

He looked at her as a lover can,
She looked at him as one who awakes,
The Past was a sleep, and Life began.

Ypres. Fancy the train running right into Ypres, with never a thought for the ranging guns! And in the full daylight of afternoon! He struggled from his coach, and had barely

time to observe the broad space before Skindles' Restaurant, the white, new buildings, the lively crowds and the standing cars, before Mr. Charles Arthur Hope filled the whole of the foreground. Young Mr. Charles Arthur Hope, in what could only be styled a red suit of plus-fours, with plaid stockings and tassels ablow; and the city of Ypres for his background. Mr. Charles Arthur Hope, trying to look like the Squire's younger son, and not succeeding. Looking instead exactly what he was: a pushing little pressman who was getting rather fat.

"Come along, Mr. O'Grogan," instructed Mr. Hope. "You didn't expect to see me, did you? When I heard that they were getting you to write up this show to-morrow, I told them that I was their man to go and look after you, seeing as I knew you personally. You remember me? It was I that put you over."

"I am hardly likely to forget the shock you gave me the next morning."

"Oh, that was nothing," said Mr. Hope.

"But it *was* something," protested Tony, though with a smile—so long ago, and so far behind Mary, seemed that old resentment. "I told you there was to be no story."

"Oh, that was nothing. It went over big." And Mr. Hope left the subject. "Look here: you know what I'm here for——"

"You're not here to write me up, I hope?"

"Not at all. . . . At least, the idea hadn't occurred to me. I dare say we might make a little copy out of you if we run short——"

"Please don't."

"Oh, you mustn't be so press-shy, now that you're a big man. No, I'm here to give you all the help I can in writing up this story. You haven't done much journalism, have you?"

"None at all."

"Well, command me. I'll do anything for you. I'll write your story, if you like; I expect it's only your name we want—really. I've got you a room. I don't mind telling you I've had a job to get it. I had to bribe the landlord to sack someone else and give it to you. And the other bloke had paid a deposit too! They're low-down dogs, these Flamin' goes; you can always buy them if you pay their price. It's not the Ritz, you know, but it's clean."

"That'll be all right," assured Tony, though unhappy about the lessee supplanted.

"Well, will you come and see it now, and park your doings, and then come and have a cup of tea at Skindles' ? The other boys are there."

"I'll come and see it now, but I don't want any tea. I want to wander out into the country and look for one or two places."

"Oh, you were here in the war, were you ?"

"Yes, I was here."

"Oh, well, that's magnificent. You must work all that into your story. Come on then ; it's only just round the corner, at the 'Pigeon Blank.'"

He led Tony into a small tavern, "*Au Pigeon Blanc*," and presented him to the fattest host man ever beheld. He raised his voice at this smiling fat man and translated his English into simple Chinese, since the poor fellow was a foreigner.

"Here's the gentleman, Mossoo ; and you look after him velly well—see ? He big man. Big Writer. Want everything of the best. Get me ? One day you tell people he stay here and sleep in your first-floor-front. You put up brass plate there. Great man. Books, you know."

Mine host could hardly bow and rub his hands, because of the immense protuberance of his stomach ; but he smiled the more, and prayed them mount the stairs. Heaving his great weight before them, he threw open the door of a room on the first floor. Tony, entering, found himself in a very clean little bedchamber, with floor new-scrubbed, iron bed, crucifix and holy-water stoup, a lithograph of the Blessed Virgin, and a photograph of Albert, King of the Belgians. He dumped his bag and his raincoat.

"Now he leave you," shouted Mr. Charles Arthur Hope to the landlord, pointing at Tony. "He in war. Fight Bosche. Give Bosche what-ho, and get plenty medals—see ? You were wounded, weren't you, Mr. O'Grogan ?"

"Yes."

"He wounded. Velly badly wounded. Nearly died. Here, was it, Mr. O'Grogan ?"

"Yes."

"He wounded at Ypres, fighting like hell. Not above a hundred yards from your door. So you look after him well. Now he going to write it all up for English papers. The ceremony, I mean. To-morrow morning. Arch. You not

look after him well, he say so in English papers, and no one come to your pub. Bad show for you—what? You make him velly comfortable, he tell the world, and crowds come to stay here”—Mr. Hope spread his arms to demonstrate the width of the multitude that would come knocking for hospitality at this door—“and they pay through the nose—pay big—see?”

The host smiled his felicitations and his assurances at the great writer, the great fighter, the great publicity agent.

“Well now, he’ll probably want a rinse,” continued Mr. Hope, forgetting to speak Chinese. “Get him some water and soap. We use much soap in England. I’ll breeze off now, Mr. O’Grogan. You’ll find me at Skindles’. Come back in time for dinner, which is at seven o’clock. You’ll see the other boys then.”

Tony did not delay for his rinse. He hurried out into the street. This city around him seemed to have a force of its own which was driving him away from its houses and out to the fields, to find, if possible, Railway Wood and the trench near the Steenbeek river, and the captured German line from which he had sallied to the assault of the pill-box. His steps were rapid over pavement and cobbles. Surely he was walking through the newest city in the world! Never a city before of which every brick was white from the kiln and every stone smooth from the mason’s yard. The new houses, with their antique crow-step gables, seemed—as indeed they were—the reproductions, in an exhibition, of ancient Flemish models. In the Grande Place the ruins of the Cloth Hall were swept white and clean, and preserved by white pointing from further decay. Behind these jagged colonnades the tower of the Cathedral was rising, white and chalky, within its cage of scaffolding.

This city glistening in the sun—was it old Wipers that, when last he saw it, was a waste land of rubble and ruin, its water-logged hollows reflecting the night? Nothing was whole in it then except the road—the pallid procession of cobbles that led to the Menin Gate. Here this afternoon were needlework shops and tailors’ shops, cafés and restaurants. Charabancs backed against the Cloth Hall, waiting to take sightseers on a tour of the battlefields. A sign-post clamoured for visitors to the “Panorama,” near the Menin Arch. Thousands of happy, excited people, though mostly in black, moved this way and

that: women in shawls and *en cheveux*, men in frock-coats and straw hats, children in Sunday suits and socks, here a priest with a broad-brimmed hat, and there a Belgian soldier with a tassel to his cap. And among the Belgian natives strolled the British ex-service-men, in dark reach-me-down suits to-day, and stiff collars and bowler hats, telling the old tale of Ypres to the women at their sides.

Only the cobbles were the same; and Tony looked at them, thinking of all that they knew. How many thousands had tramped over them, glancing left and right at the last city of this world that they would see. There were barriers along the cobbles now, ready to hold back the crowds who to-morrow would watch a pilgrimage of English women to the Menin Arch. Those women might march and march for days and for weeks, but they would never equal the numbers of their men who had tramped the same stones before them.

Ypres was ready for the pilgrims: from every sill she hung Belgian tricolours and Union Jacks; from every carnival pole and lamp standard she hung a loud-speaker that a multitude in the Grande Place and the side streets might hear the speeches and music at the Menin Arch; in every window she displayed picture postcards of "Ypres in 1915," albums of *cartes vues choisies* and souvenirs beaten from shell-case brass. Ypres was proud of her late agony, and would exploit its cash-value to the full. And why not? Why should it offend one? It was thrifty and sensible.

He turned left from the Grande Place, and there, before his eyes, was the great white Arch. "Erected to the memory of 60,000 men of the British Armies who perished in the Ypres Salient and whose bodies have no known grave." He called up imagination to aid him, but it lingered, unhelpful; and he was beneath the great span without having thought much. It was like standing in a basilica's nave. The sunlight slanted in from the west; the air was cold after the dazzling street; and the voice of another roof-gazer went echoing about the galleries. Sixty thousand names cut on walls and stairways and galleries. That was all that was left of them. Names. Not a body; not a grave. Not for them to live, and to leave the war behind them, and somewhere in the after years to find a Mary.

The great Arch satisfied him. There were those of his artist friends who affected to despise it, but it seemed to him worthy of its purpose. It arched over the story.

He rambled onward to Hell-Fire Corner, and still he could not think much. This level-crossing with its gates and sign-posts, and its houses all about it, could it be Hell-Fire Corner? It should not be difficult to branch off to Railway Wood from here; he had but to follow the railway track for a few hundred yards, and then a low green hummock on his right, where the railway neared the Cambridge Road, would be the roof of Railway Wood. He climbed over a fence and stepped along the sleepers. Open country was around him now, a pleasant landscape of green fields dotted with bright new red roofs and spangled with the light of windows that caught the western sun. No need to duck or crouch this evening. There was not a hint of the battle anywhere, except the youth of the poplars. That, and the fences made by a thrifty people out of the old corkscrew stakes, and with the telephone wire along which had run the order to die, and the barbed wire on which men had torn their bodies obeying the order. Here and there a section of a Nissen hut was being used as a shed for the tools of peace, or as a covering over the hay.

Not a soul in sight. The black-coated crowds preferred the city streets; they did not know what to look for here.

See, though! There were a few wanderers in the distant fields. Were they some of the English visitors searching like him? Yes, he could distinguish wandering men telling the old tale of the fields to women at their sides.

This green crown, with the tiny shack on top and a bicycle standing at its door, must be Railway Wood. Once it had been a clump of woodland, but the guns had altered all that, and made it into a grassy rise very suitable for a peasant's cot. Heavens! did the family within know that, fifteen feet under their earth, thousands of British soldiers had lived in mine galleries, waiting their orders to go out along the duck-boards to their share of the battle; that, down there, Kit had come home with his wounded hand and such thoughts as only God could know. Here where the cart tilted on to its shafts the battery had stood, and Tony had seen a gun-team blown to dust. Thud, thud, on this crown the gas shells had plumped, and at once the blanket curtains had gone down over the entrances to Railway Wood Dug-outs. Where were those steep shafts now, with their wooden stairs? All fallen in and silted up. That scar in the slope, a-shimmer with grass, might be the doorway where he had stood to watch the night-raid over Ypres.

He strolled to the top of the crown, where in old days one had hardly dared to stand. He wanted to look over the undulating salient towards the Passchendaele ridge.

But when he stood there his eyes were captured by something more immediate than the far-off roofs of Passchendaele. Down below the hump a man and woman were standing, with their backs turned to him, while the man's arm pointed towards Hooze, Hill 60, and Gheluvelt. On soft feet Tony went down to them, and heard the man's voice: "Gas! Law! It was gas shells all day. I always reckon it was jest abaht here I got me bit of gas. I come up one day to see what Jerry was up to, and crikey!"—his hand rose to cover his mouth—"I knew what it was before I was aht of the door! Swift! Pooff! Plunk! Gas shells by the thahsand. Mug's game it was to come up at all. I'd only meself to thank for *my* bit of gas, and I've never said anything else."

"When was this, Joe?" asked Tony.

Joe Wylie swung about, put his hands on his hips, and sprung a blasphemy. He was in his bowler hat and his best Sunday black; and his medals caught the light as he swung round. Tib was also in gallant mourning.

"Well, nah! You made me jump, sir, like one of them five-nines going off six paces to the rear. My heart's still at it. Not but what we expected to see you. We sor in the papers that you was comin', and I said to Tib, 'We shall meet him there, like as not.'"

"Well, we couldn't want a better place to meet."

"You're right there, sir! Crikey, it's comic, isn't it?—standin' together again on this little ole spot?"

"How did you get here?"

"'Ow? I said to the missus, when I sor in the papers that they were going to unveil this 'ere arch, I said, 'We're goin', if we never 'ave another 'ape'ny to spend!' I said, 'We're goin', if we 'ave to walk 'all the way!' But it turned aht to be quite easy: cheap tickets, free passports and all."

"But where are you sleeping to-night?"

"Ah, that's where I had something like a brain-storm, sir. We nipped off the train at Pop, and knocked at all the doors till we fahnd a room. And to-morrow, if we can't get into Ee-prez no other way, we're goin' to foot-slog it all the way from Pop. I'd like to march Tib along that road. I'm goin' to fall her in abaht six o'clock, cover her off, examine her

equipment, and take her name and number if necessary; and then, when I've got her properly fell in, we'll by-the-right-quick-march. And if you arst me"—he winked slyly—"there'll be some lorry-jumping to-morrow mornin', on the other side of Vlamertinghe. Did-jer see old Vlamertinghe from the train, sir?"

"Rather, Joe!"

"We come past it in a kind of lorry jest nah, sir. Gaw! it do make you think a bit to see it all inhabited. I recognized the house where we halted that day when Fred Roberts was for going on strike. At least I think I did. There's another thing, sir." Joe began to look rather arch. "Tib and I was wonderin' whether you—we was wonderin', like—oh, *you* tell 'im, Tib."

Tib adjusted her hat and her hair with a view to tackling this job in a workmanlike manner. "We was wonderin', sir, whether you, being one of the star-turns—if you take my meaning—whether you could get us a decent place at to-morrer's show. Of course I know I'm not a mother or a widder——"

"Never 'ad no such luck," interrupted Joe.

"Oh, ain't he awful, sir? . . . And the mothers and widders, I mean, must have the best places—that I shall *always* say; I'll stand back for them every day of the week. O'course! But if you *could* manage, sir——"

"I'll do what I can, Mrs. Wylie."

"Thank you, sir," said Tib, and began to plume the laces at her bosom so as to be worthy of an honourable place at the ceremony.

"And now, sir," resumed Joe, "I want you to tell her all abaht it. All abaht what it was like, this 'ere." He waved his arm over a segment of the salient, from Passchendaels to Hill 60. "You'll do it better than I can; and she'll believe you, what's more. She don't believe me, I've told her so many lies in my life. And I don't blame her. But you couldn't lie about this 'ere, could yer, sir?"

"Hardly."

"No, that's what I told 'er. I told her what Fred Roberts used to say, that it was like the ole Sinai Desert, only mud and water instead of sand: you looked to the north and there was damn-all there; you looked to the sahth, and there was damn-all there; you looked to the east and there was damn-all there; you looked to the west and there was damn-all there; in fact, beggar-all everywhere!" And since "beggar-all" was

not the exact word that Fred Roberts had used, Joe looked supremely wicked over his long forefinger.

"But what about the duck-boards, Joe?"

"Lord, yes! I'd forgotten the duck-boards. The duck-boards went cruisin' over the mud and the shell-'oles; and there was nothin' else to be seen anywhere. And look at it now! . . . Lummy, I could stand 'ere for ever!"

"And there was a kind of ribbon of fire round it all night——"

"Thet's right! You listen, Tib!"

"It was the Véry lights and the flares, and the flashing of the German guns——"

"A blinkin' firework show. Pain's best; every night for nothin'."

"And the water in the shell-holes and the lagoons would reflect the fireworks. Then there was the everlasting throbbing of the guns; and the smell—of—of which the less said the better."

"D'y'ear that, Tib? And I was tellin' her, sir, that it was fifteen feet below where we stand that her lovin' 'usband lived and cooked 'is bit o' dinner. Is that right, sir?"

"Perfectly right."

"And it was dahn there that Captain Scrase—Gawd! what he must' a' suffered fifteen feet under the soles of your shoes, Tib! When I was at Pop jest now, I mentioned going out to Proven to see 'is grave; and I felt glad, then, that I'd never told that old bleeder, 'is father—though he did give me four months! Have you ever thought, sir, that Captain Scrase never knew what the end of the war was? That none of 'em knew?"

"Yes, I sometimes think of it. I was thinking of it under the Arch."

"Oh, and isn't it a lovely arch?" said Tib. "I should think the mothers'll be prahd to-morrer. I 'ope they will, I *must* say—for *their* sakes. . . . Yuss."

"Have you traced any of the entrance-shafts, Joe?" asked Tony.

"Yes, sir. You come 'ere, sir." He led Tony and Tib round to the southern flank of the hummock, where a small landslide had undoubtedly occurred, though grass and weeds had long ago mantled the wound. "Now that, I reckon, sir, is where I stood by the door on that mornin' when you and the battalion went up to the Line for our first show. The duck-boards ran along here. It was abaht four o'clock, I think.

Mr. Hughes Anson was one of the first back, somewhere abaht three pip-emma; and I arst 'im how the battalion had got on. And he said, 'Not too brightly, Joe. Abaht half of 'em's dead.' And I said, 'And C Company, sir, how 'ave they fared?' and he only made a grimace. I 'ardly liked to arst about you, sir—not that I minded whether you was killed or not, mind you——”

Joe's finger covered this jest, and Tib said, "Law, Joe! Ain't you awful?"

——“but because I was afraid of losin' a good job and bein' sent back to the platoon. So I said, 'Mr. Aylwin all right, sir?' And he said, 'Done in.' So I said, 'Mr. Wimborne?' And he said, 'Done in.' And then I said, 'Has my boss come through all right?' And he said, 'Your boss! Lawd-a-mighty, he's won the bloomin' war. He's taken a pill-box all by hisself, and blown all its occupants sky-high, and now he's sittin' in it, feelin' sick. He'll get a ruddy V.C. And Padre Quickshaw,' he says, 'he's led a bloomin' counter-attack, and won the war too. He'll get a V.C. too, or a court-martial, being as how he's a parson.' Oh, he was one of the best, Mr. Hughes Anson. I remember that last morning, when the battalion went up for the last time, and never come back, most of 'em. I was standin' at the same spot, Tib, and Captain O'Grogan was standin' just about where he is now, with 'is arm all bandaged up—and what was left of the battalion filed past us along the duck-boards—jest 'ere, I reckon. Mr. Hughes Anson and A Company came first, and as he passed Captain O'Grogan, he said, 'So long, Bungay!'—beggin' your pardon, sir—'So long,' he said, 'you can sell all my kit for the benefit of the mess'; and when he passed me, he said, 'Hello, Joe, you ole scrimshanker. Why aren't you coming along of us?' And I said, 'Because I made a Separate Peace last night, sir.' And he said, 'Well, goo'bye, Joe. It's a good war.' And I said, 'Never a better, sir; never a better;' though I was feelin' a bit dahn, to tell the truth. I was afraid he wouldn't come back, somehow." Joe stopped and sent his eyes away over the fields. "And to think that he's out there now, somewhere!"

Tib wiped her eyes, and put a term to her husband's soliloquy. "Come on, Joe. You're keepin' Mr. O'Grogan. I expect he's got something better to do than listen to you."

"Oh, no," Tony demurred. "I'm going forward over the fields to see what I can find. Come too, if you like."

"No, thank you, sir," said Joe. "I'm goin' back by the Potijze Road, so as to show Tib where the Dressin' Station was. Funny, ain't it, how *you're* interested in the front parts of the Line, and I'm interested in the back parts? Shows what a hero I musta bin."

On this jest they parted. Tony, rambling on, was soon lost in plough-land and pasture. He had no faith that his sense of direction was serving him well, for he had never seen this ground in the daylight. And its fresh green lap was the very antithesis of that old dark moonlit swamp. But suddenly a puff of wind brought a reek to his nostrils, and with it the picture came: the ringed water in the shell-holes, and the long melancholy tarns reflecting the sky, and never anywhere a sign of life, but, all around, an horizon just luminous with morning.

. . . The picture faded. . . . Some small creature must be rotting in the Steenbeek ditch or under the long wheat.

Curious how this perky green country, now about him again, seemed to lack the dignity of that terrible landscape. This sun-flushed lift of the ground, could it have been the First Objective?—yesterday the brink of life and time, now a rise in a field. If so, the pill-box lay but a few score yards behind. But what yards! He climbed the ridge and looked about him. In the tall wheat there certainly were some tumbled chunks of concrete. But these ruined pill-boxes were everywhere in the Flanders arable, and he could not know that this one was his. However, he would go across to it and imagine it was. If these were the same few yards, how he had run them last time, and with what wild eyes, what a palpitant heart! He stood in the waist-high wheat and stared at the ruined concrete. Say it *was* the pill-box, then on this spot he had closed for ever the lives of four or five men. Had they been young men, or old? He had not had time to see. Perhaps they were young and, but for him, would have lived, and gone home, and found their German Marys. Perhaps some of their remains were in the soil under his feet.

He tried to think, to imagine, to feel; but it was difficult.

Sauntering back towards Ypres, he drew near a young peasant who was digging his patch in the evening light. By his side was a bucket, and every now and then he stooped, picked up something, and tossed it into the bucket, where it fell with a metallic clink. Tony halted to ascertain what his finds might

be. He saw that the young man was digging and turning over the earth to the depth of two spits. The first spit, when his spade lifted it, was usually empty of spoil, but there was never a second, lower spit that did not yield its red-rusted cartridge clip, or its shrapnel bullets ; its nose-cap or its shell splinter. Whenever he found a regimental badge he put it into his pocket ; if German into a left pocket ; if British into a right. He could sell them to the bazaar over yonder at Hill 60.

Of all this evening's sights this saddened Tony the most. But why ? Why should it sadden him to think that ten years had passed and the war was already one spit down ?

CHAPTER IV

SKINDLES'

IT was long past seven o'clock, and he was a late-comer when he entered the large *salle à manger* of Skindles'.

His opening of the door was like the turning of a wireless control : it amplified for him a din of chattering voices, clinking cutlery, and clashing plates. Every table that he could see had its fill of guests, and the bustling waitresses were hard pressed to minister to all their needs. A most distinguished company the room presented : the great men from the train were there, and their great ladies ; the Bishop, the Ambassador, the Merchant and the Cabinet Ministers. Most were in the black and white of evening dress, but some Generals and Staff officers added their notes of colour, with their khaki jackets, red tabs and rows of medal ribbons. It was rather like the "Berkeley" in war time.

This company had no terrors for Mr. Charles Arthur Hope, however, who rose from a table at the far end of the room, waved a signal to Tony, and called, "Hi! Hi, Hi!" Tony took a twisting path towards his face, and found him at a table with two other men and two chairs turned down to await their guests. One of these chairs Mr. Hope pushed upright for Tony.

"Thought you were never coming," he said. "Thought you were lost. This is Captain Hastings, who's got his aeroplane here, to take back our photos to-morrow. He's a famous man in his way. Like you. He flew in a Moth to India. I expect you remember."

Tony did not remember, but he said, "Oh, of course," and bowed to Captain Hastings.

"And this is Rowlands, one of our photographers. M'Gunn has still to come. He's out getting photographs and choosing

his sites for to-morrow's show. Here you are, Miss! One of 'em's come. Bring him his soup."

Tony sat down and unfolded his table-napkin.

"Tell me all the arrangements for to-morrow," he begged.

"Well, Captain Hastings here will have his aeroplane in a field near the Arch, and he'll get away with M'Gunn and Rowland's pictures half an hour before the ceremony's over. That's what he's here for. Isn't it, Captain?"

"But what's the idea of that?" asked Tony.

"So as we can beat the *Daily Record*, if possible. We want his pictures in Manchester by the evening, for our early northern editions. And we're going to have an edition on sale in Belgium by six o'clock to-morrow morning."

"Well, tell me what I shall have to do."

"We shall have a car waiting, and shove you into it immediately after the ceremony, and hustle you to Ostend, where we have the rights over a telephone wire for an hour. You'll dictate your story over that."

"Yes, but where shall I write it?"

"God knows. In the car, I suppose."

"I can't do that. In a car bumping over Belgian cobbles! No, thank you! I can only write if I shut myself in a room and walk up and down."

"Well, then, you had better write it to-night; that's all I can say. I mean, you can guess more or less what'll happen."

"No," objected Tony. . . . "I don't think I fancy that."

"The Programme's out," Mr. Hope mumbled into his wine.

Just then a diner in search of a seat came up and asked if he might occupy the chair which Mr. Hope had turned down for M'Gunn.

"No, I'm sorry, old man," apologized Mr. Hope. "But that's reserved for Colonel Anstruther, who's seeing the Burgomaster at present. I'm awfully sorry, old man."

The diner accepted his regrets, and sought accommodation elsewhere.

"Well, about your story," continued Mr. Hope. "In case anything goes wrong with it, Captain Hastings will be taking mine in his aeroplane, along with the pictures——"

"But wait a minute," interrupted Tony; "you said he was leaving before the ceremony ended. When are you going to write yours?"

"Oh, I've written it," assured Mr. Hope, helping himself to cheese.

"Have you?" Tony laughed. "Do read it to me, then. I should like to know what happened."

"Certainly," agreed Mr. Hope, but first he beckoned to the waitress. "Here, miss! Bring him his veal cutlet. He don't deserve it, I know; but he's got to live."

"*Mais oui, monsieur*," responded the waitress; and, nodding and smiling, she hurried into the clatter behind a long glass screen.

Now another diner approached the chair turned down for M'Gunn and was about to take it, when Mr. Hope put out a correcting hand.

"No, no. So sorry, old man. That seat's reserved for Colonel Anstruther, who's with the Burgomaster at present. I can't think what's keeping him. He'll be here any moment. Shockingly sorry, old man."

Touched by this courtesy, the diner assured Mr. Hope of his perfect understanding, and departed.

"Wonderful what a lot of use the Colonel's been," said Mr. Hope. "He's chivvied half a dozen away from that chair already. Him and the Burgomaster make a stout pair. Well, this story—here it is." And he drew from the breast-pocket of his coat a bundle of quarto sheets and their carbon duplicates over which he had sprawled, in a huge careless writing, his description of the Dedication of the Menin Arch. He read it carelessly, while Tony ate a *schnitzel* and salad, and sipped his *vin blanc*. It described, in noble language, the Great March of the Mothers and Widows through silent, sympathetic crowds who stood gazing—and not without reverence—while these tired women passed, who had given their all, for Belgium. It described the arrival of Albert the Good, and the cries of his loyal subjects, "*Vive le Roi!*" "That's what they *do* yell, isn't it, Rowlands?" asked Mr. Hope in parenthesis. It described Field-Marshal Lord Plumer ascending the dais, that fine old veteran of a hundred battles who had kept the gates of Ypres inviolate for so long—what thoughts were his now! "I've left a space here for any good points in his speech," explained Mr. Hope. It described the tense silence of ten thousand people—"No, that won't do: 'tense' and 'ten'"—the profound, rather harrowing silence of ten thousand people, as the flags fell from the inscription over the

Arch, while the stone lion above looked out over the immortal salient, sternly, but not without pride. Then the Last Post ringing through the sunlit noon—"Or 'rainy noon,' as the case may be"—and echoing away over the unknown graves, while hardly an eye in the listening multitude was dry——

"There's M'Gunn!" exclaimed Mr. Hope, clapping his story on the table and rising to his feet. "There he is! Hi!"

At the door stood a man of fifty in a dusty blue serge suit, with his bowler still on his head and his large press-camera still slung from his shoulder. It seemed to Tony that M'Gunn had been taking, not only photographs, but wine, in the streets of Ypres, for he stared with a sparkling amazement at the gallant company before him, swung his eyes from one red-tabbed general to another as if considering which was the best rose in the garden, blinked his eyes at their total glory, and cried:

"All above the rank of captain, stand at ease!"

After which he removed his hat, disclosing a head of wet, grey hair, and came towards Mr. Hope's table, smiling brightly at everybody, and apologizing handsomely to the ladies for any accident *en route*.

"Here you are, old cock," said Mr. Hope.

"I've bought a café," announced M'Gunn, dumping his camera on the floor. "I've bought a café."

"What for?" Rowlands asked mildly. He was a thin little man, older than his colleagues, and bruised into shyness by their loud vitality.

"To keep out the *Record*," explained M'Gunn. "It's got a lovely slant on the Arch, and I can get pictures from its windows and its roof that'll lick the *Record* into a cocked hat. So I've shut it down for to-morrow. Pretty good, eh? Shut it down for all day, so that the *Record* shan't get in. Don't ask what it cost me." Now he examined Tony. "And who is this joint?"

"That is our Mr. O'Grogan," said Mr. Hope.

"Pleased to meet you, sir." M'Gunn extended a very dirty hand. "Can't say that I've read any of your books, or that I will, either. But that's neither here nor there. What are they paying you for this?"

Tony stated his fee. M'Gunn exclaimed "Christ!" and sat down.

"It takes me three months to earn that," he continued, "but I don't blame you. What's the good of having a big name if you don't sell it for all that it'll fetch? Come along, miss! Bring the eats. Anything that's going. I don't look as important as these generals, but I'm a hell of a nob really."

"You close down for a shake," commanded Mr. Hope. "I'm just reading to Mr. O'Grogan my description of what happened to-morrow. You get busy with the soup, while I get on with it. There's a rather beautiful bit coming. It's a Mother Story."

Mr. Hope returned to his manuscript and, lolling back in his chair, read its conclusion. This was a moving account of his interview with one of the Mothers, after the ceremony. Only yesterday morning, said this mother, she had found in an attic one of the toys that her Dicky used to play with as a child. It was a toy gun. He had always been fond of soldiers, but in those far-off days she had never foreseen that he would be a soldier himself one day and lay down his life for his country. "I cried a little when I saw his name up there on the Arch," said she, "and I thought of that little gun; but I won't say as I wasn't proud too."

"J'ever hear such tripe?" inquired M'Gunn, lapping up his soup.

"Of course it's tripe," Mr. Hope accepted, "but it's what we want."

"Why?" demanded Tony, rather angrily. "I can understand your inventing stories when you've insufficient copy, but why cook up stuff like that when there'll be more emotion in this town to-morrow than any of us can deal with?"

"Must have a Mother Story," said Mr. Hope cheerfully.

"But why? Why, when the whole darned thing, if it comes to that, is one terrible 'mother story'?"

"Must have something intimate and personal," persisted Mr. Hope. "It's only women who read these illustrated papers, and if we're to catch up the *Record*, which has a million and a half circulation to our million, we must get the women. And it's this mother-sob-stuff that gets 'em."

"I wonder," murmured Tony.

"What sort of billet have you got?" inquired M'Gunn, pushing his soup plate away, and turning round to call to the waitress, "Next, please, miss."

"Not too bad," replied Tony. "A bedroom at the *Pigeon Blanc*."

"Rowlands has done better than that. He's got himself a pukka officer's billet. Sly old devil!"

"What's an officer's billet?" asked Captain Hastings.

"You ought to know, dammit. I thought you air-lads were the lads who went the pace. Weren't you in the war?"

"Yes."

"Well, then, you know what an officer's billet is."

"I do not."

"One with a blushin' daughter who'll oblige a gentleman—eh, miss?" M'Gunn winked at the waitress who brought him his fish.

Captain Hastings said nothing. He was a quiet, tolerant fellow, and, like Tony, seemed amused by the company he was keeping. He fingered his glass, smoked his pipe, and listened.

"You'd never think it of old Rowlands, would you?" proceeded M'Gunn. "Not to look at him, you wouldn't. Ah, the old devil! He do behave naughty, don't he, for an old party like him? Oh, go hon!" M'Gunn covered his maidenly modesty with a hand over cheek and eyes. "He's a Goer, he is!"

Rowlands accepted the quizzing with a mild grin.

"There's nothing in my billet that a man would touch with the tongs," deplored M'Gunn. "I think I'll go to Ostend with you, sir, and with Charlie, to-morrow. You've timed your visit well. It's right in the season at Ostend just now.

"What season?" demanded Tony, over the match flame with which he was lighting his pipe.

"The Fruit Season, if you like. The Tart Season."

Mr. Hope tossed a match at him. "Hold your noise, sweetheart. You're tight."

By this time the guests had mostly gone from their tables. Only a few late-comers, like M'Gunn, stayed gobbling the last of their meals. The waitresses, freed from attendance on the guests, were working at a long trestle table, where they sliced ham, cut rolls, and put up the sandwiches in paper-bags. The hotel expected to sell a thousand and more paper-bag lunches to the visitors who would come to-morrow from England, Brussels, Ostend and the watering-places along the Belgian Coast. The emptiness of the room uncovered to Mr. Hope's

view another table where six or seven reporters and photographers of other journals were lingering over their pipes and glasses. He shouted to them to come to his table where he would introduce them to some great men; and they came, bringing smokes, drinks, and a great deal of jocular abuse.

Mr. Hope had now a dozen companions with whom to enjoy the night; and he called for cigars, liqueurs, wine and lager. "Have what you like," said he. "Most of these things are cheap enough in Belgium;" and he chose for himself a large cigar. Tony, though rather liking the fellow, thought he had never seen anyone look quite such a bounder as Mr. Charles Arthur Hope with a long cigar.

For the first hour their talk was "shop." M'Gunn told how he had found a white-haired old Belgian dame with a perfect film-face, and had posed her for a close-up. She would do, he thought, for "Mrs. Simpson of London, who lost all three sons in the Salient." "But I'm not sure," he mused. "She looks as English as you or me, but she *would* keep smiling." Then he had caught an aeroplane high in the sky, with the Lion sitting on the bottom of the picture; which he designed as a study of "Captain Hastings flying home with the photographs." Bakewell, of *The Onlooker*, claimed to have done better than this: he had induced a Belgian soldier to stand in a field, with his head bowed and his figure silhouetted against the western sky. His head was bare, of course, and his cap hidden from sight. He should do, Mr. Bakewell thought, for "A British Tommy revisiting the scene of his memories."

"Oh, I can make those things better at home," said M'Gunn.

"Yes, but not with the spires of Ypres in the background."

"Can't I?" M'Gunn reassured him.

Then came the bawdy tales. Better and bawdier tales as the drinks released control, and the night wore on. The room was the pressmen's now, and the waitresses'; who continued to carve and slice and spread, while the piles of pilgrims' lunches rose higher and higher. M'Gunn tried to handle each waitress that passed him, but she slapped his fingers away with a laugh. He called out invitations at her retreating face, and slapped the knee which was available for her, when she should be disengaged. He waved kisses to any of her sisters who turned to consider him.

Then he led the company in song. He had a very good voice, which, if a little thick and treacherous at first, recovered its

full tone after a few minutes' exercise. He encouraged its improvement by several *dob-ray-me-fab-sobs* up and down the scale, and some generous clearings of the throat. His choir leaned back in their seats, with their elbows on tables and their feet on other chairs, and followed him in :

“ Show me the way to go home,
I'm tired, and I want to go to bed ;
I had a little drink about an hour ago
And it went right to my head. . . .”

Their success, and indeed they sang well, inspired him.

“ Now we'll have real Community Singing,” he announced, and stood up, turned his chair about, and knelt on it to conduct. “ Yes, and *without* acknowledgments to the *Express*, which is not represented here, I think.” He scrutinized all their faces. “ No. Then we didn't learn our Community Singing from the *Daily Express*, did we, boys ?”

“ No !” they roared.

“ Certainly not. Very good, then. We will now show these young ladies what community singing is like in England to-day. I'm a whale of a conductor, I am.”

He poised his baton, which was a pipe-stem, and staring at the far-distant wall with an expression as of a musical soul moved beyond bearing by a concord of sweet sounds, led them in :

“ Shenandoah, I love your daughter,
Away, you rolling river.
Oh, Shenandoah, I love your daughter,
Away I'm bound to go
'Cross the wide Missouri.”

At first the waitresses were too busy to be impressed by this soft-voiced singing. But after M'Gunn had led his choir, all sentimental now, through a very gentle rendering of “ Swing Low, Sweet Chariot,” that was like the murmur of darkies singing down the stream at night :

“ Swing low, sweet chariot,
Coming for to carry me home.
I looked over Jordan, and what did I see
Coming for to carry me home——”

they began to gather round and listen ; and M'Gunn, much encouraged, exhorted his children to surpass themselves in

the chorus of "All through the night." They had but to sing these words very beautifully, very tenderly, very wistfully, like a lot of soulful tenors in the last stages of consumption, while he sang the verses alone. They did so.

"Deep the silence round us spreading,
All . . . through . . . the night.
Dark the path that we are treading,
All . . . through . . . the night. . . ."

Ypres was silent round Skindles' now, and the words of the song seemed to enable both singers and listeners to perceive the emptiness and the dark that lay beyond their lighted windows. In Tony the lovely air, though sung by careless men, was piercing almost to the fount of tears. He drew out his pipe, and saw the fields beyond the ramparts lying tranquil under the night sky. Did the Salient look more like itself when night abstracted colour from the grass and from the bright red roofs? Would one find one's way about it better in the dark, and would one's friends seem nearer? Did the darkness give their country back to them, they who were not known of the cornflowers and the wheat and the sun?

Pulling at his pipe, he saw the sun of to-morrow slaying the Salient, and the fragments of a pill-box lying in the wheat like a tumbled cromlech.

"Give us something the ladies can sing too," shouted Mr. Hope.

"The Belgian National Anthem," said someone.

"Don't know it," grumbled another.

"Well, the Marseillaise," suggested Mr. Hope.

"Damn, no! They're probably half Huns," muttered M'Gunn, while the waitresses watched, uncomprehending.

"The Soldiers' Chorus from *Faust*," suggested Captain Hastings.

"That's it!" announced M'Gunn, and poised his baton again: "One—two—three——!"

"Glory and love to the men of old . . ."

and immediately the voices of the waitresses responded to the vigorous appeal of his baton. One of the two waiters who

stood with them, an Italian, mingled his sonorous language with the English and the French :

*" Dispiega l' ale sul vincitor,
Accendi nei cor, novello valor. . . "*

" What's that ? " exclaimed M'Gunn, dropping his baton ; and the chorus stopped abruptly.

In the darkness outside, on the broad *Place* between Skindles' and Ypres Station, an English voice was calling : " Fall in ! Fall in there ! " Many boots were treading the cobbles, and the butts of rifles smiting the ground.

The pressmen and the waitresses turned their faces to the sound and listened.

" Cover off now ! . . . ' *Shun ! Slope h'upp !* " Rifles siapped into place. " Form Fours ! Right ! By the right, quick march ! " There was the tramp of a regiment marching away. " All right. March at ease. " The order released many English and Scottish voices, which shouted greetings and banter to—to whom ? To faces, perhaps, that were peering from windows. " *Bonn joor, mad'moiselle.* " " 'Ere we are agyne ! " " Cor ! Call this Wipers ? We've got aht at the wrong station. " " How art tha, lass ? " " Oh, oh, oh, it's a lovely war ! "

All in Skindles' dining-room hurried to the wide entrance of the hotel, and then along the pavement to the corner of the street round which the marching men had turned. There, through the darkness of a narrow artery, went a column of khaki figures : Scots pipers with kilts swinging rhythmically and white knees flashing ; English Tommies with rifles slung and tunics opened at the throat ; bandsmen with their instruments in black bags. It was only the soldiers, late arrived, who would take their part in to-morrow's ceremony. (Or to-day's, for it was after midnight now.) But, for the moment, they annihilated the years, and the Past was in Ypres again. As they receded up the cobbles, and the darkness took them, they carried a song towards the Menin Gate :

" If you were the only girl in the world,
And I were the only boy,
Nothing else would matter in the world to-day. . . . "

CHAPTER V

1927

ON the ship returning from Ostend to Dover Tony sat in his chair, recalling the ceremony which he had watched the previous day. The dropping of the flags, the music of the bugles and pipes, the singing of the mourners had stirred again all the old aspiration; but he had known, even as it quickened his heart, that it would be powerless to divert him back to service and away from the pursuit of his fame and Mary's adoration. He must go on. And in the car, bumping over the flat roads between Ypres and Ostend, he had thought much of the dead men who could not return, like this, to life and love. So! There it was. . . . Quickly the ship made Dover, and the Channel rolled between him and the Menin Arch.

It was pleasant to find Peggy in his home when he entered it that night. She was to stay with them for the last few days before the holiday, and Michael, who had his duties in Southend, or pretended to have, was to meet them all at the quayside. It was as if Peggy had come back into his life for a little while. They talked for hours of the old Kensington home, and told each other tales of that far-away Family which, except for their two selves and Joyce away in India, existed no more. And sometimes behind his talk Tony would think his own thoughts; he would look at Peggy's widening hips and enlarging body, at her weary workaday hands, at the face now sad, now lively, and rather beautiful still, with its large eyes and large, soft generous mouth that had once been the Family Joke; and he would think that this Peggy was what he might have been, if ever he had been able to give himself wholly to God. She had always been so like him—a feminine translation of himself—and, in her feminine way, she had been able to rest happily in her

God. Happily? Well, no; she had longed for too many things that the world had not given her; and the old Peggy—or, rather, the far-away young Peggy—would never wholly die. Not happily, but with much serenity, and with much laughter for herself and all the other dear, quaint fools in the world. Soon they were discussing—Tony always arrived at this topic nowadays, if he could find a listener—Love, with especial reference to Irregular Love; and she surprised him with the charity of her view. From such an enthusiastic Anglo-Catholic he had expected a loyal condemnation of all his liberal theory; instead, she furrowed her brow and offered: “Yes . . . yes, I can imagine a woman finding a new and better love”—very like him, she had immediately applied the problem to herself—“and thinking, ‘Of course I can’t ask the Church to bless this, but I wouldn’t mind taking it to——’”

Tony knew to Whom she meant.

“But would you—would you suggest”—he dodged seriousness by a little flippancy—“that this party should leave her husband and go to the other lad?”

“Ah, that would depend on a lot of things,” said Peggy brightly. She was deeply interested, since it might be a delightful story for herself. “On his happiness, poor lamb; and on children, for instance. The hussy might have children.”

“Well, say he consented to her going——”

“Then he was a sweet soul——”

“Yes, granted. And say she had four children, aged respectively fourteen, twelve, ten and eight?”

“She must have been an attractive dame,” laughed Peggy, “or else she married very young. However, in that case, I think the children win. Surely?”

“But that’s what I can’t see,” argued Tony emphatically, and he got up to walk about with the argument. “I can’t see that the children have any right to inflict a lifetime of suffering on a parent—any more than—the other way round. Can you?”

And Peggy, after long thought—during which, no doubt, she met a pleasing creature, and fell in love with him, and told Michael, who forgave her—Peggy proffered a typical Peggy answer, somewhat illogical and wholly illuminating.

“Ah, but after she’d suffered, she’d have such a lot more to give the children. It would be a pity to deny them that.”

Honor had come in towards the end of the argument, and her comment was so gay and impersonal that it hurt Tony

like a whip-lash. "Well, I think you're both talking a lot of nonsense," she said. "How could it ever be right for anyone to leave their children?"

Now it was the morning, and Honor, Peggy and he were in the train that was bearing them, through ceaseless rain, to the harbour and the ship. His heart beat rapidly as they drew near the harbour town; it played an idiot game as they left the train and crossed to quayside and gangway. He realized little of the *Sagaman's* size, shape or colour as he stumbled up its gangway; for he had seen Mr. Leith, in a cap and a heavy grey ulster, standing on the deck to greet them; and Mary, in a red hat and fawn waterproof, loitering unhappily near; and, three yards away, Father Michael, in a parson's black cloth but a layman's collar, leaning his long body on the rail and grinning his welcome.

"Well, well, well," exclaimed Mr. Leith jovially, "this is fine!"

Tony presented him to Honor.

"Delighted to meet you, dear lady, I'm sure. Meet my daughter."

Tony brought Mary forward, his hand pressing comfort and encouragement on her arm.

"This is Mary, Honor, of whom you have heard so much."

Mary slightly threw back her head, as one does who calls up all her resolution; and she extended her hand to Honor, and looked at her with a deathly white face.

Tony turned away, and the moisture moved on his forehead. As he turned, he became conscious of the dark eyes of Michael Saffery appraising Mary.

A confused, hurrying hour, in which, automatically, he found cabins, sought out baggage, and unpacked—and through it all, beating within a head made of wood, the one thought: "That beautiful child, who has always been so sparkling and so happy—she is suffering—oh, what can I do for her? What can I do to give her some happiness?" He escaped from the others, and hastened along the deck, hoping he might find her alone somewhere. He found her: she too had escaped, and was resting an elbow on the rail and watching the dockyard men at their last play with the ropes. As she saw him, she said only, still watching the men: "Well, what's this going to be like?"

"We'll be alone sometimes," he murmured.

"Oh, no, no; we must keep apart. Keep away from me all the time. Please."

"But, Mary——"

"Oh, yes, yes," she insisted. "For *her* sake."

He watched the quay in silence. One could not argue now.

"My darling," he said at last—very low, because other people were coming to the rail to watch the departure, "you will know that, whether I'm with you or away from you, I am thinking of you."

"I am always thinking of you," she answered simply.

Soon after that the ship put out.

CHAPTER VI

TO ROMSDALS FJORD

TONY had supposed that Mary would suffer jealousy and want of him in the *Sagaman's* woman-filled halls; he had not foreseen that the torments would be his.

There was a youth on board. Great God, what a power for torment was that bright, unoffending youth! He was no dark young philanderer, with sensual eyes; but a pleasant, fair-skinned schoolboy from Oxford with gentle manners and attractive ways. Twenty-one, perhaps, and graceful as they made them, he waltzed and fox-trotted better than a dancing master. He found Mary on this first night of the voyage, when there was dancing in the lounge; and he kept her for his partner while all eyes watched them. Such a pair! Not till this moment had Tony, seeing himself as the centre of a love story rather than Mary, reflected that she would be the prettiest girl on board and one of the most practised dancers, and that the men—death take them!—would be all around her. It would have been less agonizing if she had shared her favours among these men; but she seemed always to prefer young Roger Kingsley. And he—his surrender to her was as simple and honest as himself. He was in love with her from the first dance. He sought her all the night afterwards, he sat against the wall with her in lively or serious chat, and he led her out into the darkness of the deck.

Tony was nothing more than a jealous animal now. Everything else slipped from him; all tenderness, all compunction. His mouth squared by pain, he found himself brandishing defiance and contempt before the eyes of Mary. He danced ostentatiously with other women, and studied to be seen by her, as he laughed into their eyes—though all the while he heard little of their talk, and his heart was like a perishing bird in its cage. At the close of a waltz with Peggy he swung a

glance around the room to see if Mary and Roger were still together. Both were gone. His sickness almost physical, he drifted on to the deck, to torture himself with a sight of them. There they were, leaning side by side on the rail, and watching the sea go by.

He wandered away. To return to the brightness of the lounge was impossible; and he climbed up a stairway to the boat-deck, and found some comfort there in the assault against his brows of a cold head-wind. To think that he had read of jealousy in a hundred books, and even written of it in his own stories; and yet only now, when he was nearing forty, had he learnt the meaning of the word. Dark angels! who was this taut creature, standing among the ship's boats with the wind bullying his hair? Not any popular clergyman known to Thamesmouth; not any kindly husband known to Honor; not any idealistic brother known to Peggy; but some stranger risen from the depth of Antony O'Grogan, who ground his teeth like a wild man in a den. Let him but think of Mary giving her kisses to other men, and he could believe that he would rather see her dead—and denied alike to him and to them. He could even imagine himself wanting to destroy her beauty, by a blow across the face, rather than leave it to tempt other men. Imagination, rioting, showed him Mary as the wife of Roger in submission to him on their bridal night; and he sat down on a hatchway with his head between his hands. Oh, why were tortures like this sent into the world?

"Never again. . . . Never again. . . . Christ, no! . . . Never again."

He had spoken these words aloud to the wind. They were a vow never again to make trial of this madness called "love." If Mary, in the end, were lost to him, and he had thoughts of seeking another such, he would remember this night, when the *Sagaman* was heading through the cold banks of the North Sea. He would remember all the ruin of the last months: the idleness, the recoil from all work, all talk, all play, the ceaseless introversion, the waiting—the furtive waiting round corners—to see her, the ache in the brows, the tension in the cheeks, and the yellow sickness in the mouth. No, not again.

Swaying a little, he went down to his cabin to bed. He would not see any more of Mary and Roger. He dared not see any more.

All night he tossed in his bunk. Unreasoning anger threw him from side to side, or forced him on his feet to get water

to his mouth. To-morrow, by being very cold to Mary and by attracting other women to his side, he would teach her whether it had been a little thing to offer her his love. She should learn to-morrow. . . . This scheme eased his restlessness. It became a pleasant pastime to make his plans ; and with them shaping in his mind, he fell asleep.

Next day he enjoyed his deliberate avoidance of her ; enjoyed seeing the bewilderment and distress in her eyes ; enjoyed a glimpse of her sitting alone in a deck-chair with her sad unseeing gaze fixed on the horizon where the mountain-mass of Norway rose grey in the sky. Not wholly enjoyed this last, for something in him whispered, " Poor child, poor child ! Go up to her and be kind to her ; " but he could not. Oh, why was it pleasurable to hurt the thing one loved ?

That night he was punished for it. The punishment was merciless ; and he took it contritely. Fretted out of the lounge by the prolonged absence of Mary and Roger, he was walking round and round the decks to find the torturing sight of them together ; he had walked many times round the promenade deck, then up among the boats on the boat-deck, then down again to the promenade deck that his glance might swing through the lighted windows of the lounge and sweep the company there—oh, this watching and hunting, this furtive spying ! never again would he sink himself in the contemptible abyss !—he had abandoned walking and was leaning on the rail, listlessly watching the night-blue seas, when he glimpsed on the rail of the deck below the arm of a white serge coat. It pierced him with a pang of recognition : it was Mary's. Other people had come to the rails, for the ship was gliding with stealthy silence into the harbour of Bergen. But Tony saw little of that old capital floating at the foot of its seven hills ; it was nothing to him ; the people looked at Bergen, but he leaned forward and looked down at Mary who had put out the world for him. At once the pang of recognition became a stab of dismay : the black coat of a man was beside her, and, as far as he could see, straining his eyes through the darkness, the man was resting his hand on hers.

" Oh, my God ! "

Reeling a little, he turned and walked away. After a few unsteady steps, he stood still, hands in pockets and head drooping.

" Well, I deserved that, I suppose. And I got it. By heaven, I got it."

Then he told himself that he could suffer this rack no longer. He must cut out this love ; cut it out. The vicious words gave relief. " I'll cut it out here and now. I can and will. It's all a matter of thought, and one can master one's thought. At the back of my mind I have always doubted whether it isn't an auto-suggested thing. Before ever I saw her I had resolved to fall in love with the first beautiful face that would give itself to me. I saw her, and I generated all this emotion out of myself ; she didn't generate it out of me. Whenever she has looked less than beautiful or spoken too childishly, I have wondered if I really wanted her. I must admit all this, and then I can be done with it. One effort of the will, and it's all over. I make that effort. I am done with it."

He believed he was ; and an immense peace filled him. Briskly, though the wooden ache was still in his head, he walked back to the lounge to take his part in the dancing. In the next hour he danced with Honor, with Peggy, and with other women ; and he was amazed how genuine his liveliness had become ; his body even seemed to share in the release, and for the first time in weeks he had an appetite and was able to eat heartily of the savouries and sandwiches that a steward was dispensing in a corner. Now back to another dance. How splendid to have one's life contented and serene again ! He was dancing with Honor now and thinking, under his talk, how glad he was to be free from all danger of wounding her, when a white coat came into the lounge and the light fell on the pale face of Mary. Just that sight of her face and he was in the depths of his desire again. And he thanked Heaven ; he was suffering again, but he was alive. He did not *want* to be done with it. It was too brilliant, too exquisitely sweet ; and he would pay every price for it.

Sanity returned to him : at least so much of sanity as would tell him that Mary, borne down with love of him, could have nothing but a dreamy gratitude to give to Roger Kingsley. Say she had allowed this Roger to court her, and even to touch her hand, it could have raised no response in her. There may have been a flirt in her once, but his own onslaught had stunned that flirt to sleep, certainly for long months, and perhaps for ever. In punishing her for nothing he had behaved like a madman.

The orchestra started a new dance ; and hastily, lest another should reach her first, he strode across the floor towards her.

"We have yet to have our dance, Mary."

Without a word she rose to partner him.

"I shall dance with you as often as I like now," he said, when they were weaving their way through the other couples.

"Will you?" There was no laughter in her upturned glance. "Why?"

"Because there is no danger any more."

"How is that?"

"All is over between us. This night I cut out my love for you for ever. Some sixty minutes ago."

Terror started in her eyes; and the sight of it delighted and charged his heart.

"Tony; what do you mean?"

"Sixty minutes ago I saw you and Roger Kingsley on the deck together."

"Oh, *him*!"

"Yes, *him*. And, as far as I could see, from my position on the deck above, you let him rest his hand on yours."

"I did not! Tony, I did not!"

"Then, my dear, I imagined it. But I think that, when I did so, I died for ten seconds."

She could not doubt the sincerity of these words, and, as they danced on, she murmured, "Ah, you mustn't imagine these things. Don't you know that——"

"Wait——" They were passing close to another pair.

"Don't you know," she asked softly, "that no one else means anything to me but you?"

"Mary, I believe I know it now."

"Well, please know it."

There was something so complete in this giving of herself; it was so free from his own trickeries, and so sweetly business-like in its statement of how her account stood, that he could only murmur, "My beloved!" and press her closer to him. And an hour ago he had doubted whether he loved this child.

"It's strange," he said later, "but you seem to have changed. It's as though you had recently become ten years older."

"I feel different," she said, looking up into his eyes.

"D'you know: a few days ago I thought of you as a child; now I think of you almost as a woman."

"I feel older," she agreed, and suddenly drooped away from him. "Oh, my dear, I'm so afraid it'll all have to end."

"No, no; it can't. It mustn't."

"But it will. I didn't know what I was doing till I met Honor. Now I think of her all day. We must end it."

"Don't say it, Mary! I can't bear it. I love you. One day I am going to marry you."

"Oh, be quiet, be quiet! . . . Listen, Tony: if I feel sure that that can never be, wouldn't you rather—hadn't we better make the wrench at once, and not later on, when it may hurt you more?"

"Hurt *me*?"

"Yes. I should have liked to be happy for a little while longer. But I don't want to be selfish. I don't want to take my happiness now, if it'll mean a greater pain for *you* later on. Oh, you *must* see what I mean."

"Listen, Mary: every day I know you I discover new things to love in you; and I think the greatest discovery of all is your amazing sympathy. I've never known anything like it."

Her eyebrows lifted in amusement: she could not see that she was different from others.

"And you must give me more of you after this voyage," he begged. "Much more, before we talk of parting. It's only the hope of that, that enables me to endure this ghastly trip."

"Is it so awful for you?" she asked.

"Awful? It's Hell. Having you near me all day, and yet never being allowed to have you alone. Seeing you always, and yet never being able to touch you or kiss you——"

"Come with me," she said.

And, removing her arm from his waist, but still holding his right hand, she drew him through the doors to the alley-way without. There she released his hand, for out of the dance room no one must see them linked; and, moving quickly, she walked in front of him down the long vista between the state-room walls, the leader of this enterprise. Without once turning to explain, she went on. Where the alley-way branched and became a bay leading to a curtained port-hole, she stopped and faced him.

"Quickly," she said.

And she hung her arms around his neck.

"O Mary!"

Afterwards—for ever afterwards—that kiss stood isolated in

memory. It was a short embrace: she had pressed hard on his lips, touched his hair, and whispered, "Darling": then drawn away, pressed his hand affectionately, and vanished. But it had borne the whole of healing, and it left him saturated with happiness.

He walked back to the lounge and the dancers; and all that night he felt on his mouth the impress of that hard visit, and knew that her lips were treasuring the same hurt. Rapt in happiness, he danced the last hour away and slept like a child that night.

The healing endured all the next day. He hardly cared if he saw or spoke to Mary; he was content to sit alone, or walk alone. The ship was moving in a fairway between skerries and mainland, and it seemed to him that his serenity matched the stillness of the dreaming channel. The bows headed between the mountains of the Sogne Fjord, and his own happiness was at one with the majestic peace around.

Down every arm of the fjord, as the *Sagaman* plied on, came the music of waterfalls. . . .

Balholm, and the ship stood.

A wide unruffled water stretched to the Balholm slopes against whose brink the ferry-boats were moored. From painted houses higher up the hill some women in gay bodices and with white skauts over their heads came bringing their baskets down to the boats. They moved on soundless feet. High above them orchard and cornfield and green *sæter* hung on to the mountain-side till the very snowfields began. On the *Sagaman's* left a ship with high prow and square sail slept beneath the frown of a mountain. It might have been the wraith of a Vikings' ship which sailed from this fjord to the ravaging of England twelve hundred years before. . . .

Hours passed before he returned from his dreamland country, with its strange still radiance, into the white daylight of clear thought. Honor's voice called him back. Honor, Peggy, and Michael were standing near him, their eyes fronting with something of awe the towering cliffs of Hornelen, and Honor's voice cried: "Oh, Tony, isn't it wonderful? Tony, why don't you go into raptures about it? How can you just stand there and *look*? Peggy, I'm afraid your brother, my husband, is getting old. He is losing his capacity for enjoyment."

"My husband." The simple trust of it. He responded

with a suitable laugh, and walked away. In the white daylight of clear thought was it imaginable that he could desert this simple trust and leave Honor stricken and stupefied behind him? No; his brain could not hold the thought. But a final good-bye to Mary; was this thought any more conceivable? No, his brain recoiled from it. Either way he looked, there was nothing but a blinded road; and, facing either blind wall, his brain stood still.

“What will happen I don’t know. I am beaten by it.”

Next morning a simple thing happened, and yet it was the most momentous event in Antony O’Grogan’s life. It was a thought, no more; and yet it carried all his future within it, as the acorn carries the oak. The *Sagaman* was slipping through the morning light, softly as a phantom, into the Romsdals Fjord. All round, the mountains shut in the silence, and Tony’s abstracted gaze, seeking the skyline, rested on the crowning peak of the Romsdalshorn. He saw it and yet he did not see it; and opposite it he saw, and yet did not see, the satanic points of the Trolltinderne. He had just been realizing that in the end, in the almost certain end, things would fall back as they had been in the past, he with Honor, and Mary out of sight for ever—and lo! he had experienced in one of those flashing thoughts, not two heart-beats long, which possibly he alone would have noticed and worried over, a faint suggestion of relief. And the relief had had its root in meanness: for a second he had distinctly thought that, Mary lost, he would be done with all the expense her entertainment had involved.

This was not the thought that carried the Future; it was the one that followed its perception. A revelation followed. A simple revelation, perhaps; but as clearly seen, as surely possessed, as intensely experienced, as any your Buddhas find beneath the Bo-trees. A truism, perhaps; but it is one thing to give lip-service to a truism, and another thing to live it suddenly and poignantly in the life. That moment he saw it: people bemoaned that love was a transient thing, a dear, fading vanity that left them stranded; and the fault was not in love but in themselves. They all wanted to love perfectly; in their secret hearts all men dreamed the same dream, and none of them saw that, if they wanted this thing, they must work for it, enlarging and enlarging their natures into vessels big enough to hold it. Instead, they indulged the sweet fancy, and spent their waiting lives narrowing and narrowing their natures by

indulging their meanness, their possessiveness, their conceit, their callousness, and all those qualities that would constrict the love when it came. So simple! It was his self-centred nature that had commanded the recession of his love for Honor—though possibly, since she satisfied him so little, he would have had to be selfless indeed to save *that*. It was the same accursed nature—only ten years' harder—that was threatening these awful, these heart-stopping halts in his love for Mary. And by Heaven, that nature was going! He would smash it, before he let it throttle his love for Mary.

The ship was at Naes, in the Romsdals Fjord; and the people, crowding the deck, were pointing to a spectacle. Honor, Peggy and Mary gasped at it, while Michael clicked a camera, and Mr. Leith hurriedly unstrapped his own. Across the face of the mountains, clouds were sailing in long strips, like white airships cruising above the valley; and other cloud masses were pouring down the gorges like cataracts, but cataracts which had been stilled by a halt in Time. Tony stared with the rest, but he was not looking at any magnificence of the outer world; he was looking at inward things. He stared at a sailing cloud and at its shadow crossing the mountain's face; and he told himself that from this hour he would slowly and steadily destroy all those things—meanness, cruelty, vanity, self-sufficiency—which had threatened his love for Mary. He loved her, and he would release the power to love her more. He would knock down the constraining walls. Forty though he might be, he would succeed. He would succeed, because the driving desire was strong enough.

This revelation which had come to him in the Romsdals Fjord was very like, so he saw, the experience called "conversion." Perhaps his nature, with the monk in it, was sure to have come to such an experience sooner or later. It had the same overwhelming conviction of sin; the same sense of sudden sight, and the same assurance of inflooding power. Only it looked, not towards a god, but towards a creature.

All that day (he might laugh at himself, but he believed in the experience) he walked the deck with something of the breathless hope of the converted; and when in the evening light the *Sagaman* bore him out of the Romsdals Fjord he looked back with a lively affection towards this place of still water and dark mountains, where he had met with a thought which would change his life.

CHAPTER VII

PAST TORGHATTEN

"IT is to be hoped she sees nothing," said Father Saffery, lighting a last pipe. His eyes, over the match-flame, were watching Honor as she passed out of the card-room. Peggy was watching him; and, knowing all about her husband and his histrionic talent, she saw that he had filled his eyes, for Mr. Leith's entertainment, with a twinkling mischief and mystery.

"Why, what are you hinting at?" she asked, gathering up the abandoned cards on the table and beginning to make them into a pack.

"Steward!" called Mr. Leith, who was their only other companion, now that Honor had gone. "Here, my lad!" and, having commanded whiskies for himself and the father, and lemonade for the father's lady, he waved the lad away. "Well, sir, what is it? What should she see on the deck?"

"Your daughter for one," laughed Father Michael.

"Flirting, I suppose. That's no news for me. Who's the poor guy this time?"

"It ought not to be beyond our united wisdom to guess," suggested Father Michael, who was apt, like many parsons, to see a refined humour in the employment of large sentences for little matters.

"That young Roger Who-do-you-call-it, I suppose."

"Gracious, no! You're badly out of your reckoning." Father Michael's pipe was not drawing well, and he pressed down the tobacco with the top of his fountain pen. "Peggy can guess better than that."

Peggy turned towards her husband; anger had leapt behind her eyes. "I don't know who you mean—at all."

"Not the parson?" demanded Mr. Leith. "Saving your presence, sir—'the young parson,' I should have said. Not young brother-in-law?"

"Even so."

"Don't be silly, Michael," Peggy intervened. "Tony isn't that type at all, and you know it."

"Oh, it's nothing serious," said Michael. "A very mild affair, no doubt. And very venial. Confound it, sir, if I were seated in an Arctic twilight with such a beautiful daughter as yours, I fear—I greatly fear I should be tempted to hold her hand. And I think I'd absolve myself later."

Peggy turned away from him with some distaste.

"Sure! Yes, but . . . yes, but . . ." Mr. Leith was perturbed. "She mustn't flirt with *him*. Let her stick to Who-do-you-call-it."

"He was never in the running at all."

"Or, better still," continued Mr. Leith, who was inclined to pay more attention to his own remarks than to those of his audience, "let her grow out of that sort of poppy-nonsense as soon as possible. I'm getting tired of it. She comes home at three o'clock in the morning, half a dozen times a week, and with a different lad each time. Lady Peggy, at what age did you begin to get a kick out of something else besides froth? Was she a flirt, sir, when you rounded her up? She must have been young enough—if you'll forgive me. Ah!—"

The drinks had arrived, and he was handing them round. He tossed some coins on to the steward's tray, and renounced, with a large gesture, all claim to his change. "What's Who-do-you-call-it done, that he's got the go-by?"

"He was never more than the smoke-screen," said Michael, looking into the top of his glass and watching the bubbles burst. "It's Tony she's fond of."

"'Fond of'! But she *can't* be fond of him. She *mustn't* be. Not in that way. You don't suggest that it's serious?"

"Oh, no; no, no, no." Father Michael was hearty about it. "Mercy, no. But I *do* think he ought to call a halt now. Peggy, you should give him some sisterly counsel. I do honestly think he's making her too fond of him."

"What makes you say that?" demanded Mr. Leith.

"Her eyes never leave him."

Mr. Leith turned his own eyes towards the window, as if he could see Mary on the deck and would consider her anew.

"It's nonsense," murmured Peggy, to the table-top.

"It's not nonsense," Michael retorted. "Everybody can see it. For a man as clever as Tony, or one reputed to be as clever, he's blind enough sometimes, I must say." The festering sore began to discharge. "It's always the same with these clever ones: their vaunted imagination is seldom equal to crediting other people with sight and imagination."

"He *is* a brilliant young man, I suppose?" asked Mr. Leith.

"Oh, yes, no doubt." Father Michael had no desire to be thought ungenerous. "I'd be the last to deny it. He knows how to put together a really amusing yarn that catches the public taste. I confess that I laughed at his last book—laughed immoderately. But it would be better, I always think, if he mingled a little wisdom with his cleverness. I can't see that he's being very wise in attacking his own cloth and thereby setting half his congregation about his ears. He won't advance the Kingdom of God among men by getting himself disliked."

"Those who love him, love him," murmured Peggy, to the table-top.

At that moment she hated her husband. With his long aristocratic figure, his priestly countenance, his even sympathetic voice, he would convey an impression of sense and sanctity to this man, even as, years ago, he had conveyed it to her. At that moment, if she had brought her real thought out of the dark, she would have seen it to be: "How can a soul so mean have a house so gracious?"

"Most people haven't the courage to get themselves disliked," she said; and added merrily, "I haven't, for one. Never, never had."

"Yes, but *is* it courage?" queried Father Michael enthusiastically. "*Is* it courage, or is it—well, a desire for notoriety? A priest's courage, it seems to me, might pursue a nobler road than the writing of sensational books whose jesting, to say the least of it, is somewhat unchaste."

"I must read 'em," said Mr. Leith, promptly. "I've never known before what they were about."

Peggy defended them to this new purchaser. "They are only sensational because they're clever enough to create a sensation."

"Ah," Michael shook a kindly head, "you'll never get my wife to hear a word against her brother, or his books. And

quite right too! But I still maintain that there's such a thing as loyalty to one's Church and one's cloth. Lampooning one's own order—it simply isn't done."

Peggy's foot beat impatiently. "Oh, but isn't it possible to attack a thing out of loyalty to it? You're all so dreadfully commonplace! Tony's an artist, and he's driven by some grander tyranny than your potty little public-school rules of what is done and what isn't done——"

"Bravo, Lady Peggy!" cried Mr. Leith.

"But wait," interrupted Father Michael, who was now annoyed. "You're presupposing that he's wholly sincere. But is he?——"

("Who are you to talk about sincerity?" thought Peggy; and suddenly, inexplicably, felt a need to giggle.)

"—All that Socialistic preaching at the time of the Strike, how much of that was sincerity, and how much a desire to be different from other people? But, let's leave his sincerity out of it. I don't really want to deny him some sincerity; not for a moment. But is he wise? Is he wise, having written such books, to behave as carelessly as he does?"

"How 'carelessly'?"

"Well, anyone can see that he's indifferent to Honor, and not at all indifferent to other women. Especially young ones. Stories about him are beginning to go the round, already. Mostly exaggerated, I've no doubt; but what's the sense in enraging half your brethren and then putting a weapon in their hands? Not all clergy are saints——"

"They are not," Peggy confirmed significantly.

"No; and I meet them, and hear what they say."

"Then they're jealous of him," pronounced Peggy. "And so are you, my dear, I believe."

"Jealous! *Jealous!*" This ruffled Father Michael exceedingly. "No, hardly that. I'd rather have my little bit of local reputation, such as it is, and know it free from reproach, than have a world-wide fame that was mixed up with calumny."

"Oh, I wouldn't!" cried Peggy. "I'd rather be famous and scandalous any day than just obscure."

The word "obscure" did nothing to smooth the father's pelt. "Ah well, I am but an obscure priest, I know," he sighed huffily.

"Yes," pursued Peggy in merry heedlessness; "and I'm jealous of Tony, if no one else is. I wanted to do big things

too, but I haven't done them—alas ! alas ! Tony was always the clever one of the Family.”

“Instead you married me,” suggested her husband, in a mood to be aggrieved.

“Exactly ! ” Peggy laughed ; and, lest she had offended him, laid her hand on the back of his.

For some time Mr. Leith had not been amused by these reminiscences ; and now he got up and pressed out the stump of his cigar.

“I think I had better go and look for this girl. Can't have her vamping respectable parsons. Good night, good people.”

He was gone, and Peggy turned and charged her husband. “Why did you do that ? ”

“I did it deliberately,” he informed her. “Tony's behaviour simply isn't good enough. I did it for the child's sake, and for his.”

Out on the promenade deck, in two long deck-chairs that touched, Tony and Mary sat pleasantly talking or meeting each other in a reciprocal silence. Often his hand sought hers, and she allowed it to rest in his clasp. The ship was cleaving through a water so smooth and thick that it might have been milk, and with a sound so level and continuous that it might have been silence.

The late night was lighter than dusk, and flushed with a rosy glow, because the Arctic sunset was at hand.

From where they sat, not seeing the furrowed water nor the long burnished wake, but only the stable panorama of sky between rail and upper deck, it seemed as if the ship was at half-speed or dead-slow. No other passengers disturbed their gossip or their reveries, because all had abandoned rugs and chairs an hour before, and gone within, when, for the first time on the voyage, the soft night-air began to chill with the breath of far-away ice. The furry collar of Mary's white coat was tight about her ears, and sometimes the hand in Tony's trembled, as the cold breath came again.

Breaking a silence, she announced with deliberate cheerfulness : “Nothing will come of it all.” She even tossed up and down her little gold powder-box, to show how cheerful she was ; and

once, when she nearly missed her catch, she snatched her hand from Tony's to save the box from falling. "I shall go back the way I came—up the beloved St. Lawrence—fairly happy in some ways, and with such a lot to think about."

"Perhaps I shall be with you."

"No. Talk sense, Tony dear. You know it's impossible."

"I'm sure I do not."

"Oh, yes, you do. In your heart you do. Listen, Tony: I'm trying to grow up."

"What does that mean, Mary?"

"I'm trying to grow up and realize that I can't always have what I want. But, oh dear, oh dear, oh *dear*, isn't it difficult? I shall go back, and one of these days I shall have my cottage by a lake in Western Ontario, and there I shall try to enjoy myself quite a lot. . . . Tony, do you think the memory of all this will become dim? Oh, I hope not!"

He recovered her hand and pressed it. "It will dim a little."

"Tony, it's so terrible to think that everyone in the world is really alone."

"Years ago," answered Tony, "a girl said almost those very words to me. Twenty-three years ago."

"That was Sybil?"

"Yes. How do you know?"

"I have been reading your poems again—which explains, no doubt, why I made that bright remark just now. Tony, I love them! They're wonderful I suppose you know"—she turned and gave him a shy, impudent look—"that they're easily the best thing you've ever done?"

"I think so. But, as far as I can remember, you are the first person who has said so."

"Oh, but they are! I've loved them always, but it's only in these last days that I've seen how marvellous they are. They haunt me—nearly all of them. There's the old woman in 'On the Road to Condé-Folie'——"

"I wrote that in a village behind the Somme."

"And did you really see her?"

"Yes; I passed her, and wrote those verses all the way home."

"Well, I suppose I shall be like her one day. Listen." Her mouth pursed in a familiar movement as, shyly, she controlled a smile:

"So bowed, old dame, with heavy feet and slow,
Through the rearward light of this retreating sun,
Your small, unworthy piece of day-work done,
Across the shadows on the road you go.

The wind is quiet, and the poplars still
And the road is level that the younger feet
Go confidently on to Condé Street ;
And yet you walk as though you climbed a hill.

I wonder did you dream when you were small
Of a full life, gaily coloured ? And it's gone—
Too faded for your thoughts to dwell upon,
Old woman, tell me, was it worth it all ?

You loved with suffering, once, as now do I——"

Tony watched her face as she spoke these words, but she only gazed at the deck-rail in front of her, and proceeded, half-smiling :

"And here and there a task you carried through,
And sometimes you despaired, as I this evening do,
Nor dared to think you'd take so long to die.

And now towards the end, and what it brings,
You move unlabouring, for it's all too late.
You wait—
Forgive me, I am young and ask these things :
Old lady, is it beautiful to wait ?"

Tony gave her his gratitude by a tight gripping of her hand. Then abruptly she jumped up and looked down on him with laughing eyes. "Oh, but I don't want to die ! I want to live as long as *you're* in the world ; and then, when I hear that you're dead, I shall have a big fight not to follow you, but I'll see it through. . . . Or perhaps I shall have forgotten quite a lot by then. . . ." She looked away. "I hope not."

"Mary . . . we don't know what'll happen."

Not heeding this, she continued looking down at him almost mischievously. "But why did you ask her, Was it worth it all You say she 'loved with suffering' once, well——?" and her eyebrows arched, as if they would inquire, Didn't that prove her point ?

"You think it's worth it ?"

"Oh, yes, yes !" Her head shook from side to side to emphasize each yes. "A thousand, thousand times ! I've

been telling myself every minute in these last days that no matter what happens now, I'm glad I have lived."

Honor did not find her husband on the deck ; nor Mr. Leith his daughter. Tony and Mary had parted a half-hour before, when the cold had increased. Tony had gone to his cabin and his bunk, and lain there wakeful ; and long after Honor was asleep he remained awake. He was thinking of the day that had passed ; and not of Trondhjem and its streets which they had visited, nor of Torghatten with its tunnelled mountain through which the blue sky shone, but of the extraordinary evidence which the long hours had given him that his nature had turned a sudden corner after the revelation in Romsdals Fjord. Corner ?—it seemed more like a *volte-face* ! Something like this had happened once before, outside the pill-box at Passchendaele, but in a smaller way ; this seemed so extraordinarily complete. It was complete, he supposed, because it drew its power from the strongest desire of his life. Presumably he had once loved his little meannesses and cruelties and conceits, or he would not have indulged them ; now he had nothing but detestation for them, and he could not believe that he would indulge them any more. They had got in the way of his love for Mary, and he had thrown them from his path. All the day he had been unable to act the tiniest lie before Honor, or to harbour any of the old resentment against her ; unable to hate Michael ; unable to feel intolerance of the stupidity of other passengers, or to floor the poor souls with a vision of his own parts. For Mary his feeling had swelled into a tenderness so overwhelming that it was impatient to give all. How in pity's name had he once found pleasure in heightening her love by piercing it with disappointments and distress ? It was in remorse for those old, inconceivable deeds that he had found her to-night and sat at her side, to give her all the happiness he could. They had been so little together that no one would notice this single indulgence, he had said.

Difficult to sleep with memory revisiting the thoughts of the day and reason battling with a conflict to which they pointed. They pointed to a perfect dilemma : how was he ever to find a harmony between this new dutifulness to all, especially to Honor, and this new fixing of his life on Mary ? In order to be

worthy of Mary and able to love her more worthily, said the dilemma, he must deny himself and stay by Honor. Or did it? Did it say something else? His head ached with the argument, and his body tossed with it through the speechless night, while the *Sagaman*, alive beneath him, moved along the shoulder of the North towards the polar seas. Then a dream bore up and slipped unperceived among his waking thoughts. He was in a park of rolling lawns and ancient trees, and all its vistas were baleful and lowering because the wild bulls were loose. They might be anywhere—before him or behind him, near him or far away—and he hurried in panic towards the Mansion; though not, as he now realized, to escape the sinister bulls, but because the wounded were assembled there. A sweeping drive guided him to the portico, and he forced a way through the loiterers on its threshold, who were whispering their news to one another, or peering for a sight of the dead. In the hall of the Mansion people were hastening to and fro, and a nurse passed him, carrying a Nominal Roll of the wounded and the sick. He begged that he might see it; and when she handed it to him, he looked for the one name that he knew he would find. It was there: "Mary Leith." He stared at it, as if staring could make it disappear.

"Yes," said a voice—the voice of Mrs. Scrase, who had turned her face towards him as she followed the Alderman to the work of mercy. "Yes, *you* did this. . . . We might have known you'd bring her to this." "Precisely," sniffed the Alderman, and raised his fingers to his bunched black tie and his high white collar, in an action that suggested indignation and contempt. "I foretold disaster from the first. Such men should not be allowed in the Church." They passed; and Tony became aware that the Alderman had prospered exceedingly, and that this was his home. "But where is she? where is she?" he demanded of the nurse. "Sister, please tell me;" and the nurse who was kind told him that she was in the little chalet at the northern end of the park.

Now he was hurrying down a glade between mountainous cliffs of rhododendron and azalea, and he could see the chalet standing among the pines at the avenue's end. Its door was bolted, but he burst it open, and went in. The interior was divided into two rooms, and round the walls of each there were ship's bunks with recumbent figures lying silent upon them. Canon Broadley, who was the only standing figure,

came towards him softly and whispered, "Yes, she's in there, but don't go near her." "I must," said Tony. "No, don't go, don't go," Canon Broadley repeated, staring into Tony's eyes till the discomfort of his stare became a horror. With an effort that wrenched the heart Tony broke from that stare and ran into the inner room. "Don't go," called Canon Broadley; but he was in the room, standing there aghast. He was staring down at Mary, who was lying in one of the bunks. She had thrown vitriol over her face, and its features were eaten away.

He said words of comfort to her, and tried to comfort her, and, after promising to return soon, slunk away.

He was back in the darkness of the park; and he knew he was never going to return to Mary. He felt guilty and mean as he slunk on, but glad of his escape. After all, it would be easier to stay with Honor, enjoying the old comfort and security and indulging the old habits, than to start a new life full of strain. Here was proof that it was only her beauty which had drawn him, and now that the beauty was gone, he was free——

"What did you say?" asked Honor, from her bed on the other side of their state-room. "Tony, what's the matter?"

He was sitting up in his bed, awake, and a blanching dawn was framed in the port-hole.

"Did I say something?" he asked.

"Yes. You called out 'Oh, no, no, no! I'll take care of you always.' You frightened me."

"Did I? I must have been dreaming."

He lay down again. Oh, no, no, no. That dream had been a lie. Whatever might happen to Mary he would never slink from her treacherously, like that. And certainly not now, after the experience in Romsdals Fjord. What had the dream meant? Perhaps that the old Adam, which he had thrust underground, had not died in a day, but had forced a way up in sleep. He might take longer to die than one had supposed. But die he should.

CHAPTER VIII

THE SHIP SLEWS ROUND

NEXT day they were in the polar circle, and at noon the *Sagaman* dropped anchor near the Svartisen Glacier.

The passengers crowded the deck to stare at an ice-field which slanted down to the very brink of the sea. Under the hull the water was a calm silk; and the same sheen spread over its distances, emptying them of colour. It seemed asleep, as if tranced by the visit of the ice. Father Michael's camera was out; and Mr. Leith's; and Honor stood by them, shivering a little in her fur coat, for a breeze was blowing down the glacier's side. Mary seized the moment and approached Tony.

"Come along here. Quickly," she said. "Quickly, please."

And she led him up to the boat-deck, and along to a wind-screened shelter behind the funnels, where she stood and faced him. Her face was pale and frightened, and the wind had disarranged her hair. He glanced around to make sure that no one was in sight, and then put out his arm to draw her to him.

"No, no. . . . Oh, this is awful."

"What's worrying you, dearest?"

"Ah, they're all beginning to suspect. Daddy said something to me——"

"But that's nonsense," he laughed. "We've behaved splendidly—on the whole."

"I think he *did* see us last night."

"Who?"

"Father Saffery. Anyway he has said something to Daddy."

"The damned interfering hypocrite!"

"Hush, Tony. . . . I was awake all last night, and early this morning I knew that we mustn't be alone together any

more on this awful ship. We said so at first, and we were right."

"I won't have my movements determined by that sickly busybody——"

"Ah, but it's not him. It's right. . . . She's so good and kind."

"Very well, then, my darling, if it'll give you some peace. That's all that seems to matter to me now—that you should know happiness again."

"Happiness again!" she echoed despairingly.

"Yes. Do try to be happy. I love you."

"And you? Will you be very miserable?"

"A bit," he laughed. "But make it easy for me by not dancing too much with Roger Kingsley."

She frowned over this proposition; and one eyebrow, gradually arching, suggested a laughter in ambush. "Oh, but I think I had better dance quite a lot with him. And with all the others too. Then they'll just think that I'm flirting all round, and I just don't mind what they think about me, so long as I don't hurt you and Honor."

"You dear thing! Mary, I repeat—in case I haven't said it recently—I love you."

But Mary's eyes were on a stokehold ventilator. "And if I were to be seen moping alone, they might suspect the truth. And that means that we must have our one dance together sometimes in full view of them all. Listen: I may dance with the others, but as you said to me that first night, I shall be thinking of you all the time." She brought her gaze from the ventilator and laid it on him. "I shall be thinking of you for the rest of my life, I think."

And so to-morrow and to-morrow—if there be any to-morrow in seas where the sun is not setting—they played their dull little parts, he feigning an enjoyment of the sights to which the *Sagaman* carried them, she pretending to a pleasure in the attentions of her admirers. One midnight the *Sagaman* put out to the open sea, and the happy voyagers saw the midnight sun. They looked along a saffron pathway, which glistened on the sea, towards the sun's rim and its corona of orange. At different points Tony and Mary stood with the others and wished that their minds were free, like theirs, to apprehend and to wonder. But the midnight sun without was but a small thing compared with their shadows within. The

ship put back into Lyngen Fjord, and there they saw the reindeer and the Laplander herdsman; it rounded the Bird Rock and disturbed the crowding sea-fowl, which trembled on the spurs or flew into the air, screaming their right to this corner of the world; it anchored off North Cape, and the voyage had reached its goal. The *Sagaman* turned about, and really headed for to-morrow.

And now one night, when she was making for Bergen to bid good-bye to Norway, Tony asked his dance of Mary and whirled her away among the other waltzing couples. They remained silent, till she looked up and bantered him: "Say something soon, or they'll think it strange."

"How well you dance," he said.

"What a bright remark!"

"Oh God, what am I to say then? I always like the way you point your left foot."

"Do I?"

"Yes. You do it when you're walking and when you're dancing, and always with damnably provocative art."

"Ah, but it isn't deliberate," she explained, picking a fluff off his sleeve. "It's my good fortune, not my fault."

"What do you mean?"

"Don't you know why I point my left foot?"

"No. I fancied it was devilry, and forgave you."

At this she rippled with laughter. "Oh dear, no! It's only because my left leg happens to be ever so slightly shorter than the other."

He gripped her tight; and she supposed that it was his sympathy.

"Yes," she said, looking up with the same gaiety, "my left shoe is built up the tiniest bit. When I was a child I had tubercular trouble in the hip-joint—don't hug me so!—you needn't be sympathetic about it, because it's all over now. . . . Why, you're trembling."

"My dear . . ." He let her suppose it was sympathy. He could not tell her that his head and face had tightened with an ache, his mouth gone dry, and his heart stopped, because her words, for a space, had annihilated all want of her.

"It's hot in here," he said, wiping his forehead. "Let's sit down for a little."

"We had better sit somewhere in view of the others."

"Oh, yes, yes. . . ." But did all that matter now? It seemed to belong to an ended story.

"Here we are!"

Brightly she led the way to two vacant chairs.

They sat together; and out of a grey misery he forced a merriness like her own. He made fun of a fat man who was spinning an enormous woman round and round, in the old style. "It must be like whisking the Romsdalshorn around," he suggested, while his heart deflated at the joke.

"And look what Father Michael's got in tow," laughed Mary.

He was about to make an unkind remark about Father Michael, when he recalled that all hate had fallen from him in the Romsdals Fjord. But was that experience annihilated too, if all want of Mary had gone? She had been its origin and fount of power. Oh, what had happened? Talk on, Mary, while I think it out, and try to escape from this pit.

It would be impossible to describe the sick utterness of the collapse that surrounded him in these seconds. He sat humpily, and hardly listened as Mary chattered. Trite and ineffective to call it hell, but if hell be a fog of defeat and despair in which one desires nothing any more but extinction and madness, and that as soon as may be, then Tony sat in that place now. She had spoken so trustfully and naturally of her shortened limb, without suspecting for an instant that his masculine desire, so largely created by her beauty, would reel beneath the blow. She did not see that news, which would have heightened her love, shivered his. His more than many men's, probably, because of his hunger for perfections. Oh, God, was it really gone, and every hope gone with it?

Then, suddenly, as he turned and looked at her pale oval face, and the black hair plaited over the ears, and the eyes that sometimes raised themselves to his, he remembered that terrible dream of a few nights before. He remembered it with a shock of wonder at its prevision. In that dream he had slunk from her because her beauty was shattered; and he had woken up crying out that the dream was a lie. And now, because he had heard that her beauty was ever so slightly flawed, he was being tempted to desert her. Was this a test for him? Yes. . . . Then, by Heaven, he would pass it! He would say, "I accept what you have told me, Mary; I accept it—of course I do!—because it's you." As he made this resolve a joy surged up in him as great as the previous despair. An overwhelming

joy and confidence, as when a man is winning towards, and is certain that he will attain, the thing that he wants ; he knew that his love had gone one step forward, and grown larger, in that moment.

“Come along !” Jumping up, he bent for her hand. “I am rested, and so are you. Let’s get on with the dance.”

The applause of the dancers had just commanded an encore from the band ; and in this second waltz Tony held Mary very close. The tight embrace was expressing for him something that was true. It was telling him that, though he had felt a great tenderness for her before, he had never known anything like this tenderness now.

The *Sagaman* was out in the unsheltered North Sea. It steamed along within the hollow of an upright cylinder whose wall was mist, and whose floor was a disk of tumbling waves. Rolling a little, she always carried this cylinder around her, always remained in the centre of its floor. Norway was now a long way behind the stern mist, and England was still a long way beyond the mist ahead. A head-wind wetted the decks and drove the people to shelter ; but Tony stood at the point of the bows, elbows on rail, watching the cloven water, and the lift and fall of the ship. It was good to be lonely there, and let the wind play the fool with one’s hair. One could think.

One could think : that uprush of love last night when he knew that he had accepted the altered Mary—it was very real. He had moved forward then ; and an effulgence of joy had surrounded him as he moved. But he must secure that advance. His thoughts kept throwing up this new picture of Mary with her body imperfect, and, at the sight, his love trembled and shuddered backward a little. Oh, curse the artist in him that cried for perfections ! He must escape this tyranny of the eye. He must ; and not only that he might be loyal to Mary, but because—as last night had revealed to him—if he lost his love, everything collapsed : aspiration, effort, hope, faith, and the desire to live ; and “his latter end would be worse than his beginning.” Somehow in a few months he had contrived to turn the whole of his life towards Mary, and to hitch it on to nothing else. His master-desire was

involved here; and, pent and frustrated all his life, it had crystallized out on Mary. The wreck that would follow the loss of Mary—not the loss of her person but the loss of his love for it—would be inconceivable to anyone whose driving motives were different. He, being what the past had made him, was compelled to fix the love. Ah, “fix it”!—in his mood of self-punishment, it pleased him to think that he who had wantonly determined to “fix” her love for ever, regardless of her suffering, was now compelled to fix his own, even though he paid for it with a lifetime of loneliness.

It ought to be simple. His love for her inward nature must be large enough to carry with it all outward blemishes. And it *was*. Oh, yes, yes. The “Oh, yes, yes,” began to flood him with joy, as it did last night. He would, and did, give all his worship to that sweet nature which, expanding under the touch of his love, had unfolded dearer and dearer qualities. “Even if nothing comes of all this, Tony, it *has* been, hasn’t it? and I am going to try to be worthy of what has been. I never expected this.” “Oh, but I don’t want to die! I want to live as long as you’re in the world somewhere.” Oh, Mary. . . . “I tell myself every minute of the day that, no matter what happens, I’m glad I have lived.” And then a few days ago: “I shall be thinking of you all my life, I think.” O my beloved, how can I doubt?

Mr. Leith and Father Michael were climbing over a donkey engine and coming towards him. Mr. Leith was in his thick ulster as if prepared for the winters of England, and Michael was in dark clothes as if the influence of his Southend parish were already reaching out to him. Beyond question they were coming to talk. He was their quarry; they had seen him in his comic eyrie, and scented at once a victim with whom they could toy facetiously.

“Getting the cobwebs blown away?” called Mr. Leith.

“Something like that,” answered Tony.

“He’s watching the sea go by, and thinking out his next book,” said Father Michael. “We mustn’t disturb the divine afflatus.”

(“Oh, go away, go away,” muttered Tony to himself, “and let me think.”) But he met them with a welcoming smile, anxious not to hurt them. Tony had never been able to hurt anyone easily—except those he loved.

“I’ve often wondered how you writing fellows went about

your work," announced Mr. Leith, now at his side. "How ideas come, and all that."

"Ask of the sea and sky," recommended Father Michael, pointing to these with a bland hand, "and the strong beneficent wind."

(The priceless fool!)

"Oh, I don't find ideas very difficult," said Tony. "It's sorting them out that's the trouble."

"But surely you run out of 'em pretty quickly?"

Tony stared at Mr. Leith. Presumably the gentleman was confusing ideas with plots; presumably he thought plots were the sole business of Tony's fiction.

"I don't see how I can ever run out of ideas. Everything that happens every day provides me with new ones."

"Well, that's fine," said Mr. Leith.

"For instance," Tony grinned—"you start all sorts of ideas in me. And so does Michael."

"Ha, ha!" This amused Mr. Leith, and he laughed abundantly. "I can't think what you could find to write about me," he said, just as Tony was thinking that he could make a very fine comico-pathetic story out of Mr. Leith; and out of Michael a dark tragedy. "A dull little old tale I should make. And the holy father too. Not much blood and thunder about him! No, *I* don't think we're very romantic old devils, do you, Sir Michael?"

Michael mumbled a negative; but it sounded formal rather than convincing, as if he secretly objected to being held unromantic.

"Darn cold here!" proclaimed Mr. Leith.

("Well, go then! For pity's sake.")

"But the weather's been good to us on the whole. In fact, this has been a darn good show from beginning to end. There's nothing like a sea-voyage, I always say. I've enjoyed every minute of it, and I guess it's done us all a power of good. Look at the father; he's ten years younger. It was a great moment when you put the idea of it into my head, sir, and I thank you for it."

Tony demurring at this praise, Mr. Leith stopped him with a "Yeah, I'll say so! It's been the best thing we've done. And now we'll have a month more in the old country; and then I and the girl'll be getting back to Canada, in time for the fall. You've never seen Canada in the fall, have you?"

"No."

"Well, you must come over and see us one day, and we'll show you what we can do in the way of autumn tints. That's where we beat the world."

Tony said that he had heard they were very fine.

Mr. Leith attempted to light a cigar, but, abandoning it because of the wind, tossed the match into the sea and turned to Michael. "I believe you're right, Father. He's in the throes of inspiration, and we mustn't disturb him. We may damage a masterpiece!"

"Yes, he's seeing visions and dreaming dreams," agreed Michael.

"Besides, it's too god-dam awful cold out here. That little old bar in the smoke-room seems a sounder proposition. What do you say?"

"If you like."

"Yeah, and perhaps the ladies'll join us there. We'll leave Genius to its own devices. It's drinking God's good air, I think. Hush! Come quietly, brother."

They had left him. Let him get back to where he was. A new Mary requiring a new love. A new Mary lesser in body but larger in nature, and she called out a different but nobler love. She did do this, did she not? Let him realize it again; let him make sure of it. Oh, yes, yes. Again the joy flooded him. And his life felt secure. The security meant a continuance of the striving to be good; and the striving to be good pointed again to the awful dilemma—but he would not think that out now. He had re-established his security: that would do for to-day.

Next morning he came quickly along the promenade deck that he might toss a glance through the windows of the lounge. An abrupt presentiment had told him that he would see Mary there, sitting alone. The room would be empty, because it was morning, and the passengers were either packing in their cabins to disembark that afternoon, or strolling the upper decks where the sun was good. Why he should believe that Mary was sitting there he could not say: the picture seemed to have projected itself unsought upon his brain like a telegraphed message.

His shock, therefore, was a queer, uneasy thing when he saw, not Mary, but Honor sitting alone in the empty lounge. Her arm rested along the back of her chair, and her face was

cupped in her hand. He stopped. Pain sat grey on Honor's face. She was a new and different Honor. She seemed at once older and younger: older than the lively youthful wife of yesterday, because sorrow had marbled her face into the tragic beauty of some universal woman; younger because, sitting there with her shoulders hunched and her round auburn head at rest upon her hand, she looked like a punished child. Perhaps Sorrow's transformation of her was not yet completed; and he was watching it pass over her. The new tragic woman was in her face, but the bewildered child was still in her body.

He guessed what had happened: Father Michael had dropped his hints in her hearing. She knew. She saw all now.

Going in to her, he asked tenderly, "My dear, you look unhappy. What's the matter?"

She started at the sight of him, and a shiver ran through her body, but she smiled back. "Oh, nothing. I've got a headache. I've been sitting in the cabin, but I suddenly felt that I couldn't stand it any longer. I wanted something larger."

"But why a headache?"

"I don't know. Tired, I expect."

"You've enjoyed the trip, haven't you?"

"Oh, yes. . . . Yes, of course. Up to a point."

"Anything worrying you?"

"No, silly. What should worry me?"

"Try a walk in the air."

"No, thanks; there are too many people about. They'll want to talk."

Well. . . . If Honor really had a headache, she had conveyed it at a touch to Tony. Defeated thought lay like a heavy iron arrow-head between his temples. "O God in Heaven, lessen their suffering, no matter what happens to me. O God, have *I* done this to them both? Could I have avoided it?" He must go out—back to the bows and get the caress of the wind on his weighted head. And there, once and for all, he must solve his dilemma and learn his course, before the ship touched port.

Two minutes later he was back in the bows, and looking towards the horizon above which the coast of England would lift very soon.

A new Mary, a new Honor, and a new self: all this had happened between port and port. Very well then: if he was

a new self, let him go into the merciless daylight of reason and not recoil if the decision he found there punished him cruelly. They only should matter now.

Quickly it grew simple. Mary would not take him while Honor loved him ; she was not built that way. And he would not go seeking his own joy, while Honor loved him ; not now. He would stay with her—but out of his strength now ; not out of his weakness. Then it was only a question whether Mary and he should part at once, or enjoy a few more happy days together, before she returned to Canada. Instantly the thought leapt, “I ought to see more of her if I am to fix her love for ever.” But no, he had done with that idea now. Rather must he do what he could to stop the love rooting too deep, so that it might heal one day. If he withdrew at once, there might be some chance of her love healing—healing enough for her to marry another man, and be very happy.

It was a terrible thought, this thought of Mary’s love healing and turning to another man, but he must take it. And, in taking it, there was a compensating joy in believing that his own love was one stage further. With a stinging pain across the eyes and a squaring of the mouth, he accepted it ; and now let his brain close on what it really meant.

He was never to see Mary any more. “Nevermore.” Strange to be nearly forty—and to be realizing for the first time the full meaning of the word. To have read stories that described a parting for ever ; to have enjoyed an easy sorrow, when quoting such lines as, “Oh, for the touch of a vanished hand” ; to have heard of bereavements and the prostration of the bereaved, and yet to have entered, only in this hour, as he stood in the bows of a ship with the wind assaulting his hair, into the full meaning of the word “nevermore.” He who had thought more than most men about the loneliness of all living people and the transience of all human meeting ; he who had felt these things deeply enough to write books and poems about them—that he should only be suffering now the full blow of the word they carried with them, “nevermore” ! But one did not really take the full blow of it ; one never could. One did not enter into its innermost heart. No ; one’s brain stood back from it, and stared at it, but did not go in. It had an atmosphere that one could not breathe.

“Not again in this life.” They would have one last day together in England, because they could not say good-bye

on this ship ; and he would part from her somewhere, and watch her figure disappear, and then see it no more.

“ O God, have mercy. . . .”

Some time later he came away from the windy bows and walked back to the promenade deck. He was hardly suffering then, because his brain was mercifully dulled at the point of suffering ; it played, automatically, on all other subjects that fell beneath its notice, but ceased to work when it turned and fronted the unbearable thought. The agony pierced momentarily, in the next few hours, if he saw the figure of Mary, or heard her voice, or heard mention of her name. He found a dull narcotic in packing his cases and doing what he could to help the others.

By early afternoon the *Sagaman* was close to England, and the people were crowding to gaze at her low hills. Mr. Leith and Father Michael were among them, in overcoats and with slung cameras ; but they were taking no photographs of the grey harbour approaching. Honor stood near them, silent and abstracted in her fur coat, but ready to show laughter, if it was asked. Mary was not there, for she was lying below : the thoughts which, throughout the voyage, she had imprisoned behind walls of gaiety, had exacted their ransom at last ; they had overthrown her body, and she lay in her cabin, feverish and sick. Peggy, as might be imagined, was down below too, sitting with Mary, and ministering to her.

And so, with Honor suspecting all things, Mary torn with thought, and Tony facing his ultimate certainties, the *Sagaman* bore into port.

CHAPTER IX

HOME AGAIN

TONY opened the door of his Thamesmouth home, and Honor passed in before him. The hall with its familiar furniture received them; and about its quiet, unknowing reception there seemed a wrongness somewhere: it was as if a flaw in the picture's glass twisted the picture faintly awry. The twist repelled one. Paston came to meet them and to take their bags and coats, and in his quiet unsuspecting welcome there rang the same jarring flaw. Honor said, "Well, here we are," but there was the ghost of a sigh in her voice. They passed into his study, and neither said anything to the other. Unspoken thoughts had sat between them all their journey home, marring their talk with artificiality or dulling it to silence; and now the same thoughts had entered with them into the house. It was nine o'clock of an August night, and cold.

"Do you know," said Honor, "I think I'm going straight to bed. I'm so tired."

"Of course you are," he sympathized. "Go to bed, my child."

"You won't mind?"

"No. I shall sit up for a little. In fact, I shall light a fire and smoke a pipe."

So Honor, giving him a curious cold kiss, went quietly to bed, and he, after strolling round and round the study, put a match to the fire, and drew up an easy chair. The nursing of the fire kept him from thought for a little while, but when presently it was crackling and flaring, he lay back in the chair and held the pipe in his mouth with both hands.

Now over the old arguments again. Now that Mary was out of sight, the craving for her was worse than in those first

prison-house days. Was there no road, on this side of that experience in the Romsdals Fjord, which could take him to her? In other words, was there any way of reaching her that was consistent with a resolve to do right? Yes, the road that led him away from all his past life and out to a new life with Mary could be seen as ignoble or noble: it all depended on the spirit in which he trod it. It was ignoble, if nothing but self-indulgence drove him; it could be noble, if, Honor having consented, he went along it in a spirit of courage, enterprise and creation—the creation of a human union that had always appeared to him more worth creating than anything else.

An ineffable joy, a white radiance of excitement, began to enfold him, as he projected himself further into this picture. Just supposing that Honor, by wishing him to go and be happy, lifted from him all sense of cruelty. . . .

An hour passed, and another hour: the servants creaked upstairs; Honor's steps overhead, which had seemed restless, ceased, and the house was quiet. A church clock struck, halting his ever-revolving wheels of thought, while he counted its strokes. Eleven. It was a relief when the last echo of its interruption had died away and he could resume thought.

Yes, the word lay with Honor. If she—if she said it, then one could go, and go “in one's strength, not in one's weakness.” What then? He gave himself up to delicious pictures. They would live half the year in Canada perhaps, and come to England for the spring and summer. Or they would do what Mary had often suggested; they would find that cottage which stood by a lake in Western Ontario, and there they would spend the summer months bathing, and camping, and paddling the birch-bark canoe by the spruce-clad islands. They might spend the fall among the crimson maples of Nova Scotia, and the winter in the warm loveliness of Vancouver Island. And he would have new country, new men, new manners to write about, instead of old humdrum stuff——

Thought was stopped again by the sound of a hesitating step on the stairs. Was someone coming down? His eyes watched the door, and its handle turned, and Honor entered, a pink dressing-gown over her night-dress and red slippers on her bare feet.

“Tony,” she began, “I'm sorry, but——”

“But what, my dear?”

“Have you anything to tell me?”

He met this with a disarming laugh. "Anything to tell you? No. Why should I?"

"Oh, I don't know. I thought——"

"No, dear. You go to sleep."

But she stayed there gazing into the fire.

Uneasily he put some coals on it, and kicked them into place. When he was back in his chair he put out his hand and gathered her fingers.

"What did you mean, Honor?"

Honor's hand lay unresponsive in his.

"Tell me about Mary," she said; and she sat on the carpet and laid an arm over his knee.

As he did not answer, she said again, "Please tell me, Tony. I'd rather know."

In the battle of his thoughts, one thought stood its ground, and it had a strange face. This new Honor, with the tragic beauty, was a grand thing. As he looked down on her he did not love, but he admired and even worshipped—worshipped this statue of Sorrowing Woman that shock had so quickly sculptured out of the old childish Honor. She was changed beyond imagining. Never before had she sunk at his knee with a movement so womanly as this. And her upturned look, with its dumb resignation, its still wisdom, was a look not to be believed of Honor's round, childish face; it recalled the sculptures or the pictures of great masters.

He tried to tell her. And as he spoke he was dismayed at the tricks emotions played on him. He had to fight a cruelty all the time. He had to fight a desire to set the splendour of Mary's response and the warmth of her embraces against the poverty of Honor's, though at every mention of such things he felt Honor's body shiver under his arm. He had to damp out a glow of triumph.

"You see, Honor dear, when I decided to go on with Mary"—she shivered again—"I knew of course that it must hurt you, but I did not think that it would hurt you unbearably, because I believed it was only affection you felt for me, and not love."

"What did you mean by 'going on'?" she asked.

"At one time I had decided that, if she would take me, I would marry her."

"Oh!"

It was a cry just breathed; and he felt the tremble that rushed

down her body. In a spasm of pity he uttered words whose finality dulled his heart.

"But I'm not going to do it, my dear. You mustn't worry; it's all over. I want to see her once more to say good-bye, and that is all. And don't think there's something very noble in this"—he smiled as he stroked her shoulders—"because there isn't! She would never consent, if I tried to make her."

Honor did not answer. She sat there, staring into the fire, and ever and again her body shivered. The fire burned down, but he made no move to restore it; not liking to disturb her or to take his arm from her shoulder.

"So everything will be as it was before," he said at last.

"Oh, but I don't know that it ought to be," she answered. "I can't grasp it, Tony. I know that sometimes, when you've been angry, you've talked of something like this happening, but I never imagined that it would . . . nor that I should mind so terribly as I do. . . . Oh, Tony, I am stupid, I suppose, and shallow, but I have loved you in my way; I don't think I ever knew how much till this moment. You must help me. You must help me an awful lot. All I know is that I want to do what is best for you."

At this he drew her closer for a minute, admiration and pity mingling.

Suddenly she stood up. "I must go. . . . I'd better be alone with it. Good night, my dear."

"Good night, Honor. And you're not angry with her, are you? Everything, from beginning to end, has been my fault. You've no blame for her, have you?"

"No. . . . No, I don't think so. . . . I think I blame myself."

"No, no, my dear——"

"Oh, yes. Yes, I'm beginning to see." Her voice broke towards sobs, and she said quickly: "But there! I can't talk about it any more. I must be alone. Good night, Tony."

Her shoulders shaking a little, but controlled, she hurried from the room.

"I want to do what is best for you." This sentence, echoing after she had gone, bathed his brain in an atmosphere of hope, and he forgot Honor in the visions that rose upon this air. He could not move from his chair, they drugged him so. Sometimes he felt ashamed that Honor should be in misery upstairs while he was luxuriating in these happy dreams, but

the thought was hardly fashioned before it was lost. He heard a single stroke from the church clock, and later two strokes; and still he sat dreaming on. They would travel over the world together—what joy to take Mary and show her wonderful places! They would share a state-room in an India-bound ship . . . a drawing-room in a Californian train . . . a tent on a Persian upland. They would have a *pied-à-terre* in Montreal . . . or Paris . . . or London, and there she would sit at his feet while he read his books, his fingers playing with her hair. And there might be a child. The wonder of having a child of Mary's! . . .

This time he did not hear Honor's step on the stairs. It was the opening of the door which startled him. She came into the room, still wearing her pink dressing-gown and her red slippers. Her face was white and drawn, and he looked at her in alarm. She threw herself on her knees at his side and sobbed, "Oh, I can't bear it. Help me, Tony, help me. I've tried to think of giving you up, and living all alone for the rest of my life, but I can't face it. Not yet. . . . You must help me."

Tony, gently patting her head to comfort her, watched the visions disperse.

"If I have to give you up, Tony, I'll try to, but I don't see how I can. I don't think I'm strong enough. You'll have to help me all you can."

("You can never ask it of her," sighed an independent voice within him. "No, it cannot be.")

"Oh, Tony, think what it'll mean to me. I shall be all alone for ever. I did love you once, whether as much as you ought to have been loved, I don't know—you're so good, so good!—but I do now—I know I do!—I love you as much as anyone can, and I know I shall never want anyone else. Oh, my dearest! . . . And no one will want me, I am thirty-six now. And oh, if I haven't loved you properly, I've been so proud of you, and now it'll all be hers. You and she will be happy together, and I—I shall have to live to be old—and it seems such a long time."

("No, it cannot be," said the inward voice. "Never. Never.")

"Tony, it can't be going to happen. Think of that day on the river, the first day we spent together, and how you kissed me and said, 'I don't like you, Honor; I love you'—do you

remember that? And listen: do you remember those days in the Isle of Wight, when we used to go for walks together on Afton Down; and oh, Tony, that night at Kruger's Grave when—when we told each other, and we kissed for such a long time, and walked home together almost frightened; and then those days making all our preparations, and going to see old Mr. Peidestros, what fun they were; and then getting married with nobody knowing; and all those early days at Sheep's Eye before the war, when we were so happy——”

(“So happy? Ah, poor child, if you only knew!”)

“And then when you were at the war and used to write me such lovely letters, all love and longing to get back—I've got them all, Tony, in a box upstairs, and I shall never dare look at them now—and that time you came on leave, how wonderful it was—Tony, I didn't fail you then, did I——?”

(“Only a little then. Just a little. But you didn't understand.”)

“I wanted you then; it was lovely to have you back. And then when you were in hospital wounded, and I used to come to see you, and I was so proud of you, thinking that the nurses would know that you were mine—though I never said so to you, I was too shy—and oh, I can see that I've been careless and slack since, and terribly stupid, and I'm so sorry, I must have been so dull for you!—but I feel so different now! I know that I want you more than anything else in the world, and that I want to look after you and do everything for you, and to give you everything. *She* can't want it more——”

Again Tony had a sense of the completeness of Honor's transformation. She was a complete woman now, whose brain and lips might speak of setting him free, but whose unconscious arts would throw out every appeal to hold him.

“I've been thinking of what it'll be like after you've gone, and it stuns me to think of it. Think of the furniture we chose together, and the chairs where you used to sit, and the shelves that held all your books. Think of my going to the drawers where your old clothes used to be. Think of my going to places where we have been together—oh, it's too awful! I could never go near any of them. I should have to go right away and be alone somewhere. I couldn't go to Father and Mother, or to friends, or to anyone I've known—I don't want any of them, I only want you. Think of my reading about you in the papers. Think of my hearing that you were ill

or dying—oh, I want to do what is best for you, but it's so awful, it's so difficult. Tony, it's crushing; it's so awful not to be wanted, help me to bear it. You and she have each other. I have no one."

"It's all right, my dear. It'll be as I told you earlier tonight. The future is yours—I see that clearly."

"Oh, but Tony, I must try to let you go to her, if it is right."

"No, no, my dear. That's over. That's all over. Go now and try to sleep."

"Oh, but I don't know——"

"Yes, dear. I have decided. It's quite, quite certain."

"But, Tony, you must be happy."

"We will both be happy. Go now and try to sleep."

When she was gone, he stood up and rested his hand on the mantelshelf. "Yes, it's over," he said. He lifted his eyes from the fender to the book-lined wall, which he did not see. Many times his head shook as, one by one, he stared at all the hopes, and denied them.

Two hours later he was still standing there.

CHAPTER X

PASS, FRIEND ; ALL'S WELL

DURING one of their long silences Tony considered the contrast between the two rooms. How different from his familiar study, where Honor had sat at his feet, was this large hotel-room, where Mary sat in an attitude almost exactly the same, her arm along his knees. His own book-lined study, untidy, personal and friendly as an old suit ; and this hired sitting-room, luxurious and characterless and indifferent ! A field of buff carpet, a long sideboard with limbs tenuous and ornate, an oval dining-table, lofty windows with long curtains and pelmets of velvet, a long wide sofa before the fireplace, and two broad easy chairs. His study, except for its four walls, would depart with him ; this room would be here to-morrow, and the day after, and next year, receiving its strangers and dismissing them when the bill was paid. It was as impersonal as the earth, which keeps its furniture to itself, and its soul to itself, though men come for a night or two, and then other men after them, and make a little untidiness, and go after paying the bill.

It was an expensive room, with a bedchamber as spacious and golden opening off it ; and to-morrow, perhaps, one of your hard-headed merchants would take it and interview his clients here, without caring what had happened within its walls the previous night ; and next week a large, square American and his wife would dump their " grips " in it—or say a Canadian and his lady who would know nothing of a daughter of Canada here before them. Himself, for instance, had he till this moment given a thought to those who had occupied the room before him ? Perhaps other couples had come here for a night or two, and made illusion real. Surely they had.

Far below the windows, at the base of this great honeycomb, the traffic of London hummed and purred; and the sound reminded him of the view he had gazed at but a few minutes before, when, the waiter removing the tea-things, it was wise to stand apart from Mary. He had seen a pale blue sky arching over London, and a low sun striking the upper stories of the buildings with a primrose light. Under the shafts of the sun, and far down in a road like a canyon's bed, red omnibuses and taxi-cabs and motor-vans streamed their two ways; while, to the right, in the middle of a London square, a quiet garden slept under plane trees. The bark of the plane trees was peeling into the bark of silver birches, and their leaves were old.

Because it was September now. Mary had written that their last day together must be very happy, so they had better wait till her father was out of town on his visit to Edinburgh, and then she would be able to remain with him till the last possible hour. "This is deceitful, I suppose, but I don't want our last few hours to be spoiled by anxiety, either ours or his, the dear soul! Oh, I think it's marvellous of Honor to let you come and see me once more. I think she's so good. It's funny, but I love her. Of course, Tony dear, it could never have been. At the back of my mind I knew it all along, but at first I couldn't bear to admit it. I can't now, if it comes to that!! Oh Mary Mary, grow up! . . ."

A September evening and getting cold; and the waiter, after bearing aloft and away his tray of standardized tea-things, had returned and lit the fire for them. "That'll be cosier, I think, madam." Its flames were dancing before their eyes now, but it did not seem a friendly fire; it remained of a piece with the room; reserved, non-committal, belonging to itself and not to them. It cast its warmth over Tony's knees and Mary's silk stockings, but less by grace of a good heart than by the way.

After listening to its low roar Mary spoke.

"Tell me about when you were little," she said.

He picked up her hand and played with it. "Why?"

"Because I know hardly anything about you, really, and this is my last chance. Tell me as much as you can."

So he talked of that old and different London, thirty years in the past, where the buildings were lower and greyer and the horses possessed the streets; and of that untidy vicarage in

Kensington where the Family had lived and made merry—not without offence to the neighbours——

“How many of you? Let me have you all.”

Father, Mother, and five offending children, Keatings, Joyce, Derek, Peggy and himself——

“Give me exact descriptions, please. Of all.”

He tried to give her these. He showed her Keatings’ quiet cynicism and Derek’s comic pomposity, both of which were cancelled now, under the soil of France; and Joyce’s vivacity which she had carried away to India; and Peggy’s frequent conversions to godliness and backslidings into sin; and his own absurdity when as a prep-school boy of eleven he had fallen in love with little Wavers (but here she shook her head); and about Freshwater and Grandelmere and St. Paul’s. “I wasn’t eighteen then, and you weren’t born. Child, I hate to think there was a time when I was alive and you were not!”

Mary nodded.

“And as for the next twenty years, when you were alive and I hadn’t met you, I can only express what I feel about them by saying that they are a permanent object of commiseration.”

She nodded again, and vigorously.

“And now tell me all about the war. Right through, please. I want to try to see you in it.”

Gallipoli—Sinai—France. Colonel Tappiter, Padre Quickshaw, dear old Hughes Anson, and Moulden, less dear. The attack at Passchendaele, the Great Retreat of March, 1918, and the fight in Grandpré, when the machine-gun caught him in head and breast—and here she shivered as if it had just hit her, and her fingers pressed his knee.

“The spring of 1918. Let’s see: at that time I was a twelve-year-old schoolgirl in New York, and thinking of nothing but a mistress with whom I was very much in love. Isn’t it all extraordinary? I feel I ought to have felt that wound, but I didn’t. I’m sorry. It was very remiss of me, I’m sure, but I didn’t.”

Reminiscence had drunk up two hours, and the fire was low. He got up and replenished it and said, “Come, we’ll go downstairs and get you some dinner.”

“Oh, must we?” she protested. “It’s getting so late, and we’ve so little time.”

“We won’t stay long. But a little bottle of Pommard nicely

warmed—or, no, we'll have a Moët and Chandon Dry Imperial to-night—come along, Mary."

The vast dining-room was crowded, and all eyes studied them as they walked between the tables to a distant corner. Tony felt very proud of Mary and hoped the people would think her his young wife, and envy him. And when they were seated at their table and he was staring at her profile—she looking around at the other guests—he received again that sense that she was older. Not her looks, but her quality, had grown older. Merrily, but gently, he told her so: something had matured her like the wine, only it had done it in a day.

"It's been rather an intensive method," she began, in a laughing reply—but to this they gave a silence and left the subject.

Their meal was very short, both being impatient to return to the solitude upstairs: and they were soon threading their way between the tables to the doors, the eyes of tardier diners following them. When they were back in the sitting-room, they found that a maid had tended the fire, which was blazing up the chimney. They resumed their former positions before it, he in the corner of the sofa, she at his feet with an arm along his knee. Thoughtfulness held them till Mary, looking up, said one of those odd, surprising things that seemed to belong to women alone, and to this new Mary more than many women. Often in these later days she had said them, and always, in some strange way, they seemed of better quality than anything he could have said. They saddened him because they hinted at the undiscovered country in Mary which he would never find now and till for himself.

"Tell me about all your faults," she said.

He begged to know why she should ask such unpleasant news.

"Never mind why. Tell me them all—every one you can think of."

He dealt with his character—but it was rather his character before that hour in the Romsdals Fjord. He mentioned an egotism which, despite all fine theories, drove him ever towards his own ends; he said that all his theories looked one way and all his temperament another; he would have liked to love everybody and go about serving them, as Peggy did, but instead he was intolerant of them and impatient

with them, and burned always to escape from their talk to his own pursuits ; he would have liked to be able to listen to people's worries and to give them sympathy and help, but he very seldom could—after five minutes of their talk, he was hardly listening to them but thinking his own thoughts ; sadder still, he would have liked to give himself wholly to one person, but he didn't seem able to do so—pride and vanity held him back ; his real desire was to possess this person like a slave and not to give the whole of himself in return ; and all this meant that he was now a bookworm creeping away always to a shut room and an easy chair—an unsociable, irritable, lonely egotist.

Mary had listened with her face to the fire, and after a pause she said, " Yes, I could have managed all that."

Two hours passed ; two hours of talk and embraces, and then he looked at the watch on his wrist, but she clapped a hand over it.

" No, don't look at that. Don't look at that."

And for another hour they sat together without speaking. Then, with a sigh, he glanced at the watch again.

" It's nearly time, my child."

" Yes."

" Almost midnight."

" Yes, I must go."

Pressing his hand once, she rose and turned towards the chair where her coat lay and her handbag. " You stay here, Tony, will you ? I would rather go alone."

" All right, Mary."

He helped her into her coat, and straightened it for her, and she smiled her thanks. They held each other for a long kiss ; and then, after one more pressure of his hand, she walked towards the door.

" Mary ! "

Turning round, she at once came back and put her arms around his neck.

" Mary, stay a little longer."

" It's so late, Tony."

" Just sit here with me a little longer. What on earth are day and night ? You would stay with me if it were still day."

" Of course I would."

" Then let me just hold you for a few hours more. Let me have as much of you as I can. It's such a long time ahead."

She hesitated, and then began to remove her coat. He helped her, and when she had laid her outdoor things aside and was ready, they sank to the sofa again. Here he held her nearly all the night. Towards morning, however, he let her lie full length and sleep for a little, while he sat on the floor with an elbow on the sofa near her feet.

"It's five o'clock, Mary."

She turned, awoke, and smiled.

"Is it? Ah, I must slip away now before anyone is about. I'll go quickly."

"Listen, Mary." Still seated where he was, he took the hand with which she had been ordering her hair, and said, "I have been thinking during the night, and I want you to say one or two things to me before you go."

"What are they, Tony?"

"Tell me—tell me first that you know that I have loved you, as I have never loved anyone else, and never shall."

"Yes, I think I know it."

"Then tell me that, though I must have brought pain to you, you have had more joy out of me than pain. Tell me this, so that I may endure the thought that I have hurt you."

"Oh, much, much more joy."

"Then tell me that you are going to be happy—yes, very happy, because one man in the world will be thinking of you always. Surely that will make you happy, and keep you happy."

"Dear, one part of me is gloriously happy now."

He stood up, and lifted her to her feet and held her by the shoulders.

"Then tell me—I am a fool, Mary, but I do so want you to say this: tell me that you will somehow be richer because of me."

"My dear, do you think that I would have missed you?"

"No, but promise me—oh, I'm a fool, but I can't *bear* the thought of anything else—that from this time onward you will set about making all this work for good in your life—and nothing else. Then I shall have helped you, and not hurt you."

"Tony, can't you *see* that that is what will happen. Can't you *see*?"

He bent and kissed her.

"Good-bye, Mary."

"Good-bye, dear one; and thank you."

There was no more. When she was dressed to go, she

reached for his hand, held it for a moment in both of hers, and went quickly.

Tony looked at his fingers, and then around the room : Mary was not in it ; that was all. She was gone, as all the others had gone. And if one went to the door and looked along the carpeted corridor, one would not see her figure now.

Pass, friend ; all's well.

PART IV

CHAPTER I

THE LEGACY

AND there it might be supposed the story of Mary Leith and Antony O'Grogan ended. But not yet. Mary was gone, but all Tony's emotions of the past months had now to flower into a dark experience before the story reached stability and a close. What subconscious forces commanded this experience in consciousness, what violent conflict between the old character and the new, before the new could conquer and occupy, he was not to know for many a day; if ever fully to understand.

This dark flowering began within an hour of Mary's going. Tony was very tired and went into the bedroom and flung himself on the bed, face downward and forehead resting on his arm. But even as he did so, he saw, with dismay, that the action was partly histrionic; he had felt as if he ought to do something like that. This frightened him into turning an inward eye on his real feelings, and honesty compelled him to admit that he was feeling nothing worthy of the dignity of the occasion. Instantly an ache of despair, incredibly painful, like a wound in his thinking, cried out: "O Mary! . . ." It sank and settled, and he told himself, "I must be numbed; that is all."

But what was this? There was more than an absence of misery. Flashing and flashing again—yes, undeniably—came a feeling of relief.

"No!"

But it was so. Relief that a strain was over. "If Mary were to come back"—for a second, and it was the most terrible second of all—it was that touch of hell again within which he had sat when she told him of her built-up shoe—he believed that he did not want her to come back.

“ Mary, it’s not true ! ”

For an hour he lay on that bed in an agony of defeated, confounded thought. A sense of loss sickened him ; it dried his mouth and turned his head to flint ; but it was loss of his love, not loss of Mary. The September morning was cold, and he put himself under the heavy bed-clothes that the chilling of his body might not distract him from thought. Come : he must suffer the true suffering, the real bereavement ; not this lie. But it was useless. He could feel nothing, nor could he believe, for the moment, that he wanted to see Mary again. Oh, this was awful ! He hurled off the bed-clothes, and went into the sitting-room to remind himself of her ; but his heart gave no response to the furniture of the room. From the floor in front of the sofa, he picked up a tiny waved hair-pin—one of those that fixed the ringlets round her ears—and he looked at it, but it did nothing for him. In tearless despair, after putting the hair-pin in a waistcoat pocket, he fell on his knees before the sofa, laid an arm along the place where she had lain, and prayed a prayer more real than any he had uttered in all his years of priestcraft : “ O God, give me back my love.”

Soon his love was back again with a rush ; and misery came because he had lost her ; and, with it, happiness because it meant that his love was secure.

He rose, and, whistling absently between his teeth, returned to the bedroom, replaced a few articles in his bag, shut it sharply, and went out through the bedroom door. He could not face the sitting-room again. Walking rapidly, but with no apprehension of the people and the traffic in the streets, he arrived at Fenchurch Street Station, found his train for Thamesmouth, and sat his body in an empty carriage. And there, during the hour’s run to the East, he just stared in front of him, his jaw slightly dropping. At Thamesmouth he stepped out on to the platform and, to his alarm, reeled ; he tried to walk a few paces and he swayed. It was as if the balance-control of his brain was injured, and he was compelled to stand quite still for a few seconds while he mastered it. Then he walked up the familiar hill to his home. People greeted him, and he answered them gaily, and they suspected nothing.

At home, in his study, he put away everything that could remind him of her—her letters, a pocket-case she had given him, the hair-pin. He put these things in a strong box ; and before he shut down the lid a paroxysm of sobbing shook and

doubled his frame. Tears made him happy because they gave the lie to those thoughts on the hotel bed. "Ah, good; there was nothing in all that." He lifted out the packet of letters again, kissed it, and laid it back in the box. Then he shut and locked the lid.

The walls of silence were around him for a lifetime now.

Next day the enemy attacked again. He was walking along the sea-front; he had talked merrily with parishioners he had met; and now there was a stretch of pavement along which he could think of her. And suddenly his brain threw up a picture of her as he had seen her that day leaving the beech-wood, with her shoulders rounded and her face turned away from him. *And he did not love her in that guise.* At once the sickening sense of loss, the dried mouth, the tautened cheeks, the flinty head.

He stopped still. Here was some poison that must be got at. Why these awful moments when he almost disliked her, and the horror of despair that followed them? Was it that he had been torn by the emotions of the last months, and the harrowed ground was ready to come alive with fears? Or was it that the old character, which didn't want anything imperfect, which didn't want to make sacrifices, was shooting these ghastly shots at the new? The awful moments he could not explain with any certainty as yet; but the horror of despair that followed them was easy to understand. He had contrived, for good or ill, to orientate the whole of his life towards this Mary Leith—to make her, as it were, his magnetic north—and if she failed him, everything collapsed.

Yes, that was it—his fist clenched as he stood still on the pavement—he was compelled to go on slaying the old character that this orientation might hold. He was compelled to continue that steady disciplining of himself that he had begun in the Romsdals Fjord. Strange! He was never to go to Mary, and yet he must continue training himself as though this were his goal.

And thereafter this self-disciplining, if it was nothing else, was a happy game of "make-believe," enabling him to endure. It became, perhaps, the one sure delight of his life. An exhilarating exercise! Drill out every fault that fettered him

from loving people. Those walls of self-content behind which he fled from other people, he must unbuild them and come out to the people, lest, if he went to Mary—what was he saying?—he should sometimes be irked by her and want to escape. His absorption in writing and hopes of fame, he must allow this no more than a share of his life; he must practise ministration to other men's hopes and needs. That vanity which would come close and whisper, "Listen, you are Somebody Esquire, and she was altogether too small for you," it should be slain on the threshold; and slain it was, with the answer, "*I am not yet worthy of her, but, by God! I am going to be.*" That hardness and cruelty in him, if any of it was left, it should be drilled out: he must be gentle, for instance, with Honor, and love her—for love of Mary; he must hide his pains from her and appear lively that she might think he was recovering from his infatuation, and be happy again. All his irritability and impatience with people's silliness, these must go too, lest, if he went to Mary—ah, that picture again!—he should ever be chafed by her whims and her weaknesses.

But each day, and many times a day, the enemy attacked. And always with a weapon of one pattern. It threw up into Tony's consciousness some mannerism of hers, some gesture, or some tone of her voice that he imagined now he did not like; and for a second he was repelled by her. And he stood, dismayed. Then the enemy whispered: "Perhaps it was all illusion. Consider: you craved to love someone, and you determined to fit into your craving the first pretty girl who would respond to you; did you not? Do you remember those early days when you doubted, but determined to go on with an adventure, no matter how she might suffer? Do you remember that day when you saw your Vicar, heavy and coarse and old, and said to yourself, 'Yes, I am going on. This may be my last chance'? Was that love? Do you remember that day in the beechwood when, after taking your glut of kisses, you found her less lovely and thought 'I will enjoy her for a little, and then lose her'?"

Sick, his heart pulsing at all speeds, his head wooden, his mouth dry, he stared at these too cogent thoughts, and all his being cried out, "No! I loved you, Mary."

Surely, surely: he had begun all wrong perhaps, but he had loved her in the end. Come, memory; show me the times when I loved her passionately. Memory showed them—many,

many of them—and he soared triumphantly away from the hateful foe.

For some hours after he would be secure and happy ; then, suddenly, he was staring into the enemy's face again, with his heart irregular, his head wooden, and his stomach sick.

It was in church : he was standing in his stall, while the hymn before the sermon was sung, but he was not seeing the choir-boys in front of him, nor the lake of faces down in the nave, nor Canon Broadley at prayer before he preached ; all this had hazed out and he was staring at the enemy who whispered :

"Tell me : are you not terrified of meeting her now, lest one of these mannerisms should shiver your nerves and prove my word, ' Illusion ' ? "

Terribly true it sounded, but he would not answer " Yes."

" You know it ; you know it," persisted the enemy. " You know you would rather see nothing of her than risk such moments. And think : they would recur and recur ; your very fear of them would create them. See ! you are terrified of meeting her now."

" No," answered the breaking Tony. " Only till I feel well again. Only till I'm healed of all this."

" You will never be healed of it. You want her as a perfect dream, and you will always dread going to her, because in your heart of hearts you believe she would fail the dream."

" It's a lie ! " he cried. " Or if it's not, I'll shrink my dream till she can fit it. But it's not true. I love her, and no figment. I am just frightening myself ; that is all. I am ill and worn-out, and at the mercy of an over-subtle brain. You are torturing me unnecessarily——"

To escape, he turned his face towards the dense congregation, and far away at the back of the church he saw a face like hers under a hat like hers—he was always seeing these faces—and straightway a mist of longing saturated him ; and he was safe again.

" There ! " he cried. " I *do* want to meet her again. I dream of little else. There is a real I behind this sickly wrangler, and it shows itself in moments like this."

" Or is it the dreamer that shows itself ? " asked the foe—and the argument was going round again ; round and round ; Tony standing still as death in his choir-stall, while the hymn went on.

The hymn was over, and Canon Broadley was in the pulpit, saying an Invocation. Congregation and choir sank to their seats, and the light dimmed. Tony, in the surplice and stole of his priesthood, leaned back in his stall with fingers locked round his knee, thinking—thinking—while the Canon's voice rambled on. "Oh, but I don't want to die! I want to live so long as you're somewhere in the world!" How bright her eyes were then. He could see them sparkling now. "I tell myself every minute of the day that I'm glad I have lived. . . ." "I never expected this. . . ." "I shall be thinking of you all my life, I think." Mary, my beloved!

In Heaven's name, how could it have been that, a few minutes ago, he was battling with a torment of doubt?

It was late at night, and he was sitting in his study alone. He had just defeated another assault of the enemy, and was aglow with renewed security. Sunk in his chair he was living again that last day in the hotel sitting-room and recovering, one by one, all the dear, appealing things she had said and done. And at length he came upon a picture of her drawing from her purse a little slip of paper on which she had pencilled some questions she must ask him before he was out of hearing for ever. This picture was too much: it broke him up into a spasm of sobs. "Oh, Mary, how could I ever doubt?" The tearing sobs gave him assurance, and therefore happiness, till—suddenly—he knew the enemy was before him. It just showed him Mary as less than lovely, with a shortened limb, and the spasm of weeping stopped, as if a guillotine had fallen.

"See?" said the torturer. "It is the dream-creature for whom you weep. You do not weep for the real."

"A lie, a lie!" he screamed, though nothing left his lips; and he jumped up, and stood trembling. "Her weakness only makes me love her more."

"But are you weeping now? Look hard at that shortened limb and see that she was not the creature you thought her. Now try to weep."

"But if I lost a little of my love for her body, I grew to love her nature more and more."

"Look hard at her uneven limbs——"

"But her face, her face! So lovely——!"

"Look hard at her face in moments when it droops and loses its loveliness, and try to weep. You cannot."

He could not.

"O God, what is happening to me?" He rushed out, and his body walked rapidly over the empty pavements while his brain fought the denier; nor would he turn about to go home till he had laid him low. He would break his love past this doubt that inhibited tears. He arrived in country lanes and rested against a gate. And there, seeing nothing of the meadow before him, he fixed his inner eye on that Mary whose beauty was impaired. He saw her exactly as she was—and holding that paper of questions in her hand. Pity rent him; the sobs tore through his body. He was weeping for the real Mary, and he was happy.

Exhausted, but serene, he turned to walk home.

And as he walked home, he vowed that he must stabilize this serenity. He must finish these fears once and for all, by some clear-cut statement of the truth.

"It is simple. I see what causes these fears—I think. In the beginning I was only trifling with you, Mary, whether I admitted it to myself or not. And now I am being punished for having trifled with you, careless of your hurt. My punishment for having begun with lies is that I must suffer now these hell-like moments of doubt. I deserve it. I am glad to be suffering. But I grew to love you truly, my dearest. I loved you from that hour when I resolved to overthrow my character for you. And my love went forward when it refused to be beaten by the destruction of my picture of you. And all this is teaching me that love, if it is to endure, must pass out of mere glamour and sparkle and sugared sweetness into something sterner and stronger and dryer. It is the difference between a cheap wine, and a wine of quality; but it is not easy to train the taste to make this change. . . . I am finding it hard. The old romantic Adam kicks as he dies."

As he was thinking thus, his brain framed a sentence whose place in this context he did not at first perceive.

"She broken, or I broken, all would be well."

Distinctly his brain had said it; what had he meant by it? He saw what his thought had been. If Mary were to be struck down by the London traffic and confined for life to a lie-abed chair, he would know no joy like devoting the rest of his life to her. Such an external accident would enable him to take

at a leap the steep hill he was climbing now. And it would be the same with her, if the accident were his. And in either case both would be perfectly happy, because not all the health in the world could weight the scales against this final amplification of one's lonely self in another person. That would be quiet ecstasy.

Sure that in this thought he had found the truth of his feeling for Mary, he was exultant again; and he told himself that he was free at last of these morbid fears.

But no: day by day the terrible alternation went on. Bright summit and dark pit; bright summit and dark pit; did ever any man tread such a road of heights and chasms? When would he stand on a flat table-land with no pits to threaten him any more?

It passed understanding. Struggle to understand it as he might; stand detached from himself as he would and examine every moment of his days with Mary, he could find no adequate cause for so racking a conflict; the experience dodged and eluded analysis. It was not rational, because in the lowest pit he did not really doubt; some part of him stood steady within and cried, "Fool! Fool!" And over the whole experience, day after day, over the crowns and the chasms, hung a golden glow of certainty, and, trembling always in its light, the old impossible hope that somehow, some day, he would find her again. The telephone-bell could not ring without the hope leaping. If only this were some word from Mary! God knew what word, for the hope had no source in reason. The garden gate could not click, nor the postman's letters scatter to the floor, without the hope leaping again. If only—— But there was never anything. And he took but a light blow, because he had not really expected anything; and he returned to his seat and went on hoping.

Who could have believed that hope and despair had the same face? One morning he heard the gate click, and, hurrying to the window with his hope, he saw the gardener planting daffodil bulbs; and immediately thought, "Spring. . . . Mary. . . . What will spring be to me? Nothing." All the beauty of the earth stirred the same quick response—the hills lifting out of the smoke of December mists, an evening sky of green and aquamarine, the first crocuses lighting the winter gardens—all pierced him with the same emotion, and it was both a poignant joy of hope and a poignant sense of loss.

Remorse. For the first time in his life he knew the full torment of remorse. One evening he was walking in a street of villas, and calling on reason to destroy one of the visiting fears. The rain poured down; it quickened to beating; but he strode on with his problem, vowing "I'll halt nowhere, till I've solved this. Oh, Reason, help me out of this." Reason obeyed almost too well. Flashing its white light, it showed him, not only the foolishness of his fear but also the foolishness of his hope, and in that dreadful moment of conviction he endured a black, unspeakable despair. Out of this despair the thought sprang, "Does *she* have moments like this?"

"O God, no!" Catching her pain, he cried for it to be removed. "O God, don't let *her* suffer like this. She came all joy to England—sailing down her beloved Gulf of St. Lawrence—and I took her and gave her this. . . . O God, I can't bear it. . . . Give me her share of the pain. Give me all of it. Let her forget me, and be happy. Anything—anything, rather than that she should suffer like this. Ah give me something that I can *do* for her. . . . O God of mercy, I will never be cruel to anyone again. . . ."

This cry came so surely from the profoundest depths of him that lo! it carried its proof of the completeness of his love, and at once he was exultant with happiness.

This, then, was the end of fear. He could doubt no more. What folly it had all been! He was on the table-land at last, and he walked there with a singing heart and an elated step. A woman of figure more perfect than Mary's passed him—and he had pitched. Down and down he fell. The enemy had sprung up and shown him Mary's figure with its shortened limb. Here were the headache, the tightening of the facial nerves, the sick-pulsing heart. The thought that he could contrast another woman with Mary, and sicken, poisoned all his confidence. Oh, it was useless, useless. This neurosis in his loving was there for ever. He could fight no more; he would give it all up. It was over. "Good-bye, Mary. I loved you, but not enough. Oh, my darling! . . . I am deserting you now, but I am done for."

For the fraction of a second he experienced relief; and the fact that he could know relief, though only for a pin-prick of time, plunged him deeper into the abyss. He must escape from the pavements, and the mocking twilight, for his mouth was working for tears. "Oh, Mary, I have given you up. My

love for you has gone, as my love for everyone has always gone. Oh, Mary, my beloved, what am I to do?"

He hurried away with his misery around him like a cloak. Whither? Custom drove him towards St. Wilfrid's Road; he was on its wet pavements and saw the lofty arc of his own church. He hurried on. "Oh, Mary, I cannot endure this thought of not loving you. This recession of love kills me. What does it mean?" He turned on to the asphalt yard between the Tin Room and the church's southern wall; and pushing open the south door, he hurried through and left it to swing to and fro behind him. The church was almost dark, but he passed the light-switches without a thought for them. It was loneliness in a large place that he wanted; not light. Now he was pacing the tiled floor from transept to transept—back and forth, back and forth—between the pews of the nave and the steps of the chancel. His sweetest belief and his sweetest hope were dead. He had believed that he loved; it was a delusion. He had hoped that some day they might be together; he did not want it now—he would be terrified of it—every mannerism of hers, every gesture and action that he did not wholly like would start this torture into life again and he would be fretted into a hate of her. He might even touch the fringe of madness, and, in his torment, strike her.

"Oh, Mary, no! I'll not come to you to hurt you. It's over. . . ."

"Oh, no. Not over. I can't bear the thought. I *don't believe* my love was delusion, but if it was, I'll make it real! Even though I fight against reason and destroy it. What care I for sanity without my love of Mary? 'Delusion'? God, it's laughable to use such words of what I felt for Mary! . . . I know, I *know* that I loved her as I loved nothing else in the world. It's all so strange: I have but to affirm this love, to doubt it; I have but to deny it, to know the denial a lie. What am I to do?"

Dazed, he staggered up the chancel to the altar rails and fell to his knees on the communicants' step. He pressed his face into his hands. "O God, give me back my love."

It was the place where, years before, he had prayed to God to enable him to be a good priest.

CHAPTER II

DIOCESAN CONFERENCE

A MORNING of sunlight heightened by the brilliant sea ; and all the clergy of Coleborough Diocese were converging upon Thamesmouth, and all the roads of Thamesmouth were but different routes to the Parish Church. The Diocesan Conference was calling the clergy first to a solemn service in St. Wilfrid's and then to their deliberations (which might God direct and rule) in the Large Concert Hall of the Kursaal, Thamesmouth. Alone, in pairs, in twos and threes, the black-coated clergy were filtering out of the station and down the High Street ; and the gapers on the pavements turned and stared after them.

"J'ever see so many of them at one go?" a man in a muffler, standing at a corner, was heard to ask of his companion.

"No," answered the companion, and left the matter there, not anxious to understand it.

"One can see where our taxes go," mused the man in the muffler.

Shop-girls, apprised of an abnormal development in the street outside, came to their doors or their upper windows to study the passing of these good men, and, absurdly, to giggle. Why to giggle? Granted that these ecclesiastical visitors were of every pattern, but that should not be so very amusing. Some were clearly "ministers," and they were soft-skinned men, with moustaches and white ties, who carried umbrellas delicately ; others were clearly "priests," and they were either very fat or very lean, and always shaven, if not clean-shaven. Some of these priests wore overcoats over their cassocks, and that, perhaps, was legitimate substance for laughter. Sometimes a clergyman came along who was neither a "minister" nor a "priest," but a high dignitary in gaiters ; and he deserved [a

longer gape than others, and, absurdly, a more delicious giggle. If, by chance, the legs below the apron were imperfect, the gigglers were compelled to run back into the shop, lest their amusement became uncivil. Occasionally a parson bowled by on a bicycle, and a thing which was not funny as a rule was funny this morning.

It was much the same on the sea-front, whether on the hill-road down from West Thamesmouth, or on the level road along by the eastern town. Sombre-clad clergy were hurrying towards St. Wilfrid's. But the road from the west had no loafers, while the road from the east had plenty, most of whom were leaning against the railings of the esplanade. They lolled there and lipped their "fags" or tended their teeth and were grateful for the passing of the clergy, which introduced a little variety into the morning. Joe Wylie was there with a few of his friends. He leaned against his railing and pushed back his bowler hat and thrust his hands into his pockets that he might be at ease to comment on the unusual appearance of the Thamesmouth streets.

"Wotcher think it is, George," he inquired of his neighbour. "An outing?"

"No. They ain't dressed for an outing. They're dressed for work."

"Chrimes!" Joe drew a hand from his pocket and laid the forefinger along his loose moustache, now quite grey. "Are they going to get to work on us, d'you suppose?"

"As like as not."

"Gawd!"

"Here's one-and-a-half," said George.

The priest to whom he alluded was certainly the best thing that had so far appeared. He was a monk, whose plump contours were overhung by a black robe that, lifting in front, uncurtained his sandalled feet. His tonsure was covered with a black skull-cap, and his stomach was girdled, or suspended, by a white rope.

"Christ!" exclaimed Joe.

"No, it ain't," corrected George. "It's a ruddy monk. You can always tell 'em; they have ropes round their waists like that."

"Rahnd their waists! Ought to have 'em rahnd their necks," asserted Joe, who, like all Englishmen who never go to church, was resolved to have no popery in his services.

“ ‘Waist,’ too! Say it again! The less said about his waist the better.”

“ You’re right, Joe.”

“ Yes.” Joe watched it disappearing. “ Yes, it’d get its rosette in the Fat Stock show any day.”

George was also watching it, as the monk propelled it up the street. “ Wollops about a bit, don’t it? ”

“ Yes. Must have cost quite a lot, that waist. That’s what we pay to keep up, George, you and me.”

“ I’ll believe you.”

“ Tib ought to ‘a’ seen ‘im. She won’t swaller it, if I tell her I seen anything as good as that. Whenever I tell her a real first-class story, she as good as says I’m a liar.”

“ So y’are.”

“ Nah and then, perhaps. But it’s aggravatin’ not to be believed when you’re speakin’ Gawd’s truth. She’d have liked that feller—she’s always had a soft spot for the parsons. For my part, I never could abide above three of ‘em. There was an old codger of hers that nearly got me converted. Tib said I ought to come along to the meetin’ and hear him, but I said, ‘ Not in these trousers, old lady.’ I said, ‘ I ain’t the sort to be taken in by his gaff. I may look a fool,’ I said, ‘ but I’m not as green as I’m cabbage-looking.’ ”

“ Aren’t you? ” queried George, as one surprised.

“ Well, I was, this time,” Joe allowed, delightedly. “ Not arf I wasn’t! I went along, jest to please her, once or twice, and lumme! the old gen’l’mán cawfed up so much gospel at me that I got windy and let on that I was feelin’ converted. But it don’t last, summah, that sort of thing. Then there was our padre in the war. Did I ever tell you about ‘im, George? Padre Quickshaw. He was a funny little cove, but The Goods, if ever a padre was. Diggin’ with the boys in No-Man’s Land, sweatin’ along with ‘em on the march, spittin’ all over the front row at Church Parade, cussin’ ‘em all to blazes—gaw, he was a fair treat. Did I ever tell you how he got his D.S.O. up at Passchendaele. If ever a man earned his D.S.O.—”

“ Here’s a long ‘un,” interrupted George.

His head had indicated Father Michael, who, hurrying past in a tight-fitting cassock, did look exceedingly tall.

“ Gaw! ” Joe studied the whole black length of him, from his hat to his heels and from his heels up to his hat again. “ Well, he’s a sky-pilot, anyway.” He followed him with his

eyes till he ceased to be of interest. "Then there was Captain O'Grogan, up at the Parish Church. I never thought to see him a padre. He was my officer in the 15th, and a gentleman too—him and Captain Scrase." Joe, though he would never tell the tale of Kit Scrase, could never refrain from alluding to him, even if only gratuitously. "Yuss. A lot of things Captain O'Grogan and I done together. Three years we was together, and never a crawse word, as you might say. Kissin' terms, almost. And, funnily enough, we each stopped our packet the same day in the Great Retreat, March, Eighteen. . . . Of course I'd bin gassed before that, at Ee-prez, and had a touch of shell-shock, but it was not till the Great Retreat that I was properly disabled. When I heard he'd come to the Parish Church I thought I'd take to goin' regular, just for old time's sake, but I couldn't get on with it summah. Now I come to think of it, he used to try to get me to come to church in France. He must have always been religious. He used to arst me, 'Are you comin' to the Padre's service, Joe?' and I'd say, 'Me, sir? Gawd forgive yer, sir.' But I went more than once. Yes"—Joe passed his finger under both sides of his moustache because he was about to drop a very humorous remark—"I went along and sang me hymns. Sang 'em like one o'clock."

"Gawd help us," muttered George, contemplating this picture over a tooth-pick.

"Yes; sang 'em like—*Hello!*" This was a sharp exclamation from Joe. "Turn aht the guard there! Turn 'em aht! 'Ere's his lordship, the ex-Mayor!"

On the other side of the road Alderman Scrase was passing. Very dignified he looked in morning coat and tall hat, his humourless face carved by thought. He had just been down to the Kursaal to see that all things were correctly ordered and now was returning to the service in his church.

Deliberately, with exaggerated rigidity, Joe stood at attention till the ex-Mayor had passed. Then his lips squared with venom.

"Aye, that's the s—— that give me four months for fightin' a copper in the General Strike. Four months, mind you! And I could have downed him if I'd wanted to. I knew a thing or two that would have put him where I could find him any day of the week."

"What things?" asked George.

"Never you mind. I didn't do it then, and I'm not going to do it nah!—for Captain Scrase's sake, who was a gentleman. But how that old snitch and his missus ever had a son like our Captain Scrase I don't know. It beats me. But if I could bash in that tile of his, jest once——"

By this time all the clergy and all the lay members of the Conference were in the pews of St. Wilfrid's Church, making one compressed black congregation. Father Michael and Alderman Scrase were among the last to arrive, and they had difficulty in finding seats. Canon Broadley, as became the Vicar of the church, was travelling most genially up and down the aisles. He was in high fettle at this happy event in Thames-mouth, and its effect on the spiritual life of our Borough—though, to tell the truth, the Borough remained much the same after the visitation as before it.

At ten o'clock the service began. The only clergy to take their seats in the chancel were Canon Broadley, the Bishop of Coleborough, and the curate of St. Wilfrid's, who acted as Bishop's Chaplain.

The service was a form of shortened Mattins which could offend no one; a kind of Highest Common Measure of Anglicanism. Canon Broadley read it in a voice that was given much ardour and impressiveness by this happy event in the life of our Borough. The curate read the lessons, and when he walked to the lectern there was a stir among the heads of the congregation; they wanted to see this curate of St. Wilfrid's who was a rather famous fellow. "Rather famous" was as much as most of them would allow, it being difficult for men of slow imagination to see how a junior curate of their diocese could really be as famous as, say, Mr. H. A. Vachell, whose books they had read but of whose person they knew nothing. Some of them, who disliked him intensely for having attacked their cloth, would not allow the word "famous" at all, but substituted "notorious," or, if that seemed too much like granting him what he wanted (or what they would have liked themselves), called him "one with a craving for cheap notoriety."

Perhaps these last were faintly disappointed in what they saw, for the youngish man at the lectern did not look in the least like a mountebank. Indeed the face that glanced at them over the eagle's crown was as "spiritual" as any in that congregation, and its large eyes were surprisingly sad. With his

hair dark on the top and nearly white now over the ears, his face sharply moulded in the cast of thought, his eyes so lusted, and his figure that of a tall undergraduate, this young O'Grogan certainly had a presence. And one was forced to admit that there was no trace in him anywhere of conceit or bumptiousness. If he was really bumptious he hid it very well.

After the Third Collect and some prayers by Canon Broadley for our Church, our Diocese, and our National Life at this time, the Bishop went into the pulpit and gave a Charge. A last hymn, and the service was over. The clergy and lay members struggled out of the west doors and strode in a hurrying, haphazard, talkative procession along the sea-front to the Kursaal. Once again the pedestrians on the pavements and the loiterers on the railings turned to watch such an endless chain of parsons, so eager and so noisy. Joe Wylie was still there with his friends and offered his view of the phenomenon.

"The dinner-bell's gone," said he.

"I'll believe you," said George.

"More'n I do. . . . No"—Joe drew some strands of his moustache into his mouth and chewed them over the mystery—"No; I've got it, George! The Bishop's havin' an Orderly Room, and they're gettin' fell in for a strafe."

"There are heaps of Bishops," said George.

And, in truth, more than one dignitary went by in apron and gaiters. Whenever such a one crossed and delighted the vision of Joe, he sprang smartly to attention, and stayed there till the gentleman was six paces past.

"They're the Divisional Generals, George," he explained. "Why don't you treat 'em with proper respect? 'Tisn't often you see half a dozen Bishops of a mornin'."

"They get ten thousand a year, those blokes," said George.

"Well, that'll keep 'em in fags," Joe suggested.

Father Michael came out of the church alone; he was not a popular man. Presently he had a sense that somebody was mending his pace to catch up with him; and a turn of his head showed him that it was Wallas, of St. Peter's, Leigh Bank. The Rev. F. W. Wallas was a fussy little fat man with a silken brown beard; and when Michael Saffery and he were walking side by side, the one with melancholy strides, the other with short quick steps, they were not unlike an ecclesiastical Quixote and his squire.

"What did you think of that?" asked the squire.

"One day," said Father Michael, "we shall have the courage to begin a Diocesan Conference with a High Mass."

"Yes." Mr. Wallas, a Moderate High, was not sufficiently interested in this point to debate it. "Broadley's putting on weight."

"Weight tends to accumulate in a prebendal stall, I've noticed."

"It does. . . . I was interested to see the sensational O'Grogan." Mr. Wallas was one of those who shied from the word "famous." "He's your brother-in-law, or something, isn't he?"

"My wife is his sister."

"First time I've seen him in the flesh, though I've seen his photograph in the papers."

"Have you?" asked Michael, rather as if he had never done so himself.

"I can't think why he stops in the Church, holding the views he does."

"I don't want to appear supercilious," pronounced Michael, "but I must say they always seem to me such extraordinarily youthful views. I mean: I got most of that stuff out of my system in the Sixth Form at school. Most men of intelligence know that there is a great deal of bunk in the world, and not a little in the Church, but they don't feel driven to write smart books about it."

"Quite so. Quite so," acclaimed Mr. Wallas, who would have given much to be able to write such a book and make a success of it. "I agree with you absolutely. And it's so disloyal—giving the enemies of the Lord their occasion to blaspheme. And it would seem he doesn't stop at writing either."

"What do you mean by that?"

"Well, if all one hears is true——"

"What have you heard?" asked Michael, who was beginning to understand why Mr. Wallas had hurried his steps to join him.

"I can't believe it's true," fussed Mr. Wallas. "If it were he wouldn't have the face to stand up there and take his part in the service before all of us. It'd almost amount to sacrilege."

"But what is it? What have you heard?"

"It's only at third or fourth hand, I confess. There's a woman in my congregation, and she has a well-to-do friend who

was staying last September in the Royal Alexandria Hotel, London, with her daughter. They were dining in the restaurant, these two, when O'Grogan came in. The daughter recognized him at once because she's only seventeen and has a passion for his books, it seems. Cuts out his photograph and sticks it on the front page."

"I know the type," nodded Father Michael, with some pity for them all.

"Yes; and she was so excited that she ran to the bureau afterwards to make sure that a Mr. Antony O'Grogan was staying in the hotel. And of course he was."

"Well, why shouldn't he?"

"Wait. When he came into the dining-room he had a singularly lovely girl with him, who certainly wasn't his wife, because she was hardly more than eighteen. They looked him up in 'Who's Who' and found he was married fifteen years ago. This was a dark-haired child——"

"I think I know who that girl was. He was very friendly with her."

"*Very* friendly. More than friendly, one might say," suggested Mr. Wallas succulently. "A very modern friendship, indeed."

"What do you mean?" Michael screened his eager interest behind incredulous laughter. "You're not suggesting that she spent the night with him?"

"She certainly did."

"I don't believe it. How can you know?"

"This woman and her daughter found that their room was on the same floor as his, and in the morning they chaffed the chambermaid about having a famous writer in her care. And the chambermaid told them, in the course of their talk, that the young lady had come very quietly out of O'Grogan's suite at about six o'clock in the morning."

Michael muttered an expletive, as was appropriate. But the story had stimulated other and inappropriate feelings. Feelings that he did not like; or (perhaps it would be truer to say) feelings that he would not have liked to be overlooked. He knew that he was pleasantly excited by this high-seasoned rumour; that, remembering the beauty of Mary Leith, he was pruriently stirred by it; that, remembering the hostility of Tony, he was hoping—strongly hoping—that it would blossom into wide publicity.

"I hope this story is not widely known," he protested to Mr. Wallas.

"More than one of the brethren have spoken to me of it," said Mr. Wallas, shaking his head sadly, to conceal a warm satisfaction. "Two this morning."

"But I imagine you have kept it as quiet as possible?"

"I have kept it quiet, you may be sure, but"—Mr. Wallas spread impotent hands, and Michael, who was no fool, knew that this bustling little busybody rejoiced in their impotence—"you know how the women tattle among themselves."

They had now entered the concert hall, whose seats were fast filling with the sable audience. Michael, walking between the chairs and the wall, saw Alderman Scrase sitting in solitary dignity and pushed his way to a chair at his side, Mr. Wallas following.

"Ah, Saffery!" greeted the Alderman. "Sit down. A most dignified address of his lordship's this morning, was it not? Most impressive."

"Yes," said the father, who, being a good Catholic, had chosen to think it a milk-and-water affair. He sat next to the Alderman; and Mr. Wallas sat next to him, his umbrella between his knees.

The Bishop appeared on the platform, took the president's seat, and the First Session was begun.

Michael did not listen to the speeches; he could think only of the story he had just heard. The Archdeacon of Southend might be expounding Prayer Book Revision, but Michael was picturing Tony and that dark-eyed Mary Leith in the privacy of their room. And he knew that, while his lips must condemn him, his heart, frustrated and hungry, envied him, disliked him, admired him for his courage, and was jealous of him for its success. He knew that he was impatient to get home and tell Peggy the tale; that he would be driven to whisper it to others of Tony's clerical enemies; that he would pretend to do all in his power to suppress it, but secretly would be comforting himself with the knowledge that its life was sure.

The First Session was over. All were picking up their hats.

"I would ask you two gentlemen to come home to lunch with me," said Mr. Scrase, "but there is insufficient time. I thought of having a little something in the town. Perhaps you would care to join me. As my guests, of course. As my guests."

"We should be delighted," said Michael.

"Thank you. Thank you very much, Alderman," gushed Mr. Wallas.

The three made their way through the crowd and out into the sunny street. Not speaking much, the Alderman led his guests to the Kursaal Creamery, pushed open its glass door, and walked in. Its tables were already black with an assortment of lunching clergy, and its gangways were populous with other clergy who were craning their necks to seek a place for food. The few civilian eaters were staring in astonishment at this invasion—and eating.

No room on the ground floor. Mr. Scrase led them upstairs, and a waitress, recognizing the ex-Mayor, found them a table in a corner. Mr. Scrase picked up the menu. "Whatever else one does in this establishment, one must take cream."

Michael, who did not think this very funny, did not smile; but Mr. Wallas laughed heartily, since his distinguished host had bent towards a joke. Always Mr. Scrase, being an important man, or having the air of importance, was followed by a timider echo; sometimes it was his wife; sometimes it was Mr. Bray. To-day it was Mr. Wallas. Mr. Wallas was very ready to sit in the office of squire, temporarily vacant.

After ordering a table-d'hôte luncheon for all, Mr. Scrase solemnly loyal to his joke, commanded heavy supplies of cream for Father Saffery's fruit salad and Mr. Wallas's meringue.

Then he began to talk; and his talk, as appeared only fitting to him, was a grave and ponderous consideration of the topics debated that morning, which suited neither Michael nor Mr. Wallas, for Michael had not heard the debates, or, when he had heard them, had thought them very Anglican and wishy-washy, and Mr. Wallas was fussily eager to get back to the more piquant dish of Antony O'Grogan. Somewhere between the soup and the next course, he managed to do this.

"A very fine service in your church this morning, Alderman," he said.

Mr. Scrase nodded. "Most impressive, I thought. Most dignified."

"You've quite a famous curate in your Mr. O'Grogan."

"H'm." Mr. Scrase left this opinion without a comment.

Mr. Wallas turned to Michael.

"Would it be fair to tell the Alderman what we were discussing this morning?"

Michael shrugged. A shrug that committed him not at all. If events moved forward without his aid, he was not responsible.

"What was that?" inquired Mr. Scrase.

"Should I tell him?" Mr. Wallas repeated.

"Certainly tell me," commanded Mr. Scrase, whose dignity was a little injured by being left like a child, uninformed.

"It might be wisest in the long run . . ." Mr. Wallas ruminated aloud—and within the next few minutes the story was told.

Indignation would be too small a word to fit the Alderman's response. It was horror; it was confusion; it was wrath.

"I never heard such a story! If it's true—if it's true—he should be hounded out of the Church! But it can't be true. I can never believe it. Have you charged him with it?"

"Me? No. I've never seen him till this morning."

"But you, Saffery?"

"Please . . . I am not in this. . . . I beg you to leave me out of it. He is my brother-in-law."

"Yes, I know. . . ." The Alderman was balked and bewildered; and, as often happens, he found relief in solving an easier and more immediate problem. "Confound it, is it never possible to get any mustard in these places? Waitress, would you very kindly give us some mustard? . . . Thank you. . . . Yes, I know, but . . ."

A relationship did not seem very impressive in such a shocking affair. One's manifest duty to the Church should surely take precedence over all other considerations. . . . Surely. . . . There was a duty to be done . . . to the people . . . to the sanctity of Orders. Good heavens, it was unthinkable that such a man should be allowed to——

"I am incapable of realizing it. It's unimaginable. Does Broadley know anything about it?"

"I should think not. It has only just worked its way round to me."

"He cannot know anything about it. Of course not. Or he would not be sitting still under it. I must—no, it would be better to ascertain first how much of it is true. It would be dreadful to be making such suggestions if there's some horrible mistake."

"I sincerely hope there is a mistake," assured Mr. Wallas, who would have been cruelly disappointed at any such anticlimax.

"I sincerely hope so too," agreed the Alderman, and he was speaking the truth. . . . "There is your cream. . . . Good heavens, I feel really shaken by this. I have felt all along that that young man would bring himself to disaster . . . but I pray we may be wrong." He took out his watch. "Time's passing, but don't you hurry. I will just call for the bill. . . . Waitress !"

He sank into silence while Father Michael blent his cream with his fruit salad, and Mr. Wallas adjusted his to his meringue like a bricklayer adjusting mortar to a brick. It is probable that all three, whether or not they knew it, were happy and aglow, but the Alderman the least happy of the three. Mr. Wallas, could he have given a true expression of his feelings, would have changed his shaking of his head into a rubbing of his knees, for he had seldom spent so spanking a morning ; Father Michael, who had spiritual insight, knew well that if a sponge could be passed over this story, he would not wish it to pass ; Alderman Scrase, restless and fretted, was mingling a large distress, and not a small pity, with his unseen delight in indignation, and in the prospect of doing his duty and taking a strong line.

Soon afterwards they walked silently to the next session of the Diocesan Conference.

CHAPTER III

THE BEECHWOOD AGAIN

AND all the days Tony was engaged in his ding-dong conflict with the enemy. The enemy's weapons were blunter, maybe, but they could still stun; and never a day but Tony took their blow, or fought to avoid it. In times of despair he would tell himself that, even if the impossible hope were granted him and he married Mary, this sickening fear would haunt his life. Because he had entered upon his wooing of her frivolously and heedlessly, this doubt, this messenger of Satan, must always buffet him. Its strength would become less and less, but it would never go; the thorn was in the flesh.

Meanwhile the astonishing process of sanctification went on. One by one, the walls of self, which had constricted his power to love, went down. Astonishing that a few months of his secret asceticism should have built such muscles of will; in the power of Mary's name they would lift any weight. No self-sacrifice for others was too difficult; he had only to say, "For her sake, that I may love her perfectly," and he went and did it. He searched for opportunities of difficult kindness; he hungered for them; and, each kindness done, he felt a peculiar thrill as if he had taken a step nearer Mary. As strange a development as any was the power that had come to him to love Honor. The awakening of desire in Honor had undoubtedly worked its own physiological changes in her, giving it would seem, a new softness and roundness to her limbs, a new freshness to her skin, a new seductiveness to her movements, a new sweetness to her expression, and a new gentleness to her nature. But it was not this change in Honor, remarkable though it was, that enabled him to love her better; it was the change in himself. Peevishness shed and generosity induced,

he would chafe no longer at her failings, or other people's, and was free to love them where they were fine and good. All this time he kept his sufferings from her view and showed her only liveliness and high humour, that she might be happy again and without anxiety for him; and he rejoiced to do this. Sometimes it cut like a knife that she should suppose he was forgetting Mary, but there was a joy in taking this wound for her sake; and, on the whole, their fellowship together—so strange was Mary's gift to them both—had a sweeter quality than any since its first years.

It was along this road that the enemy ambushed him again. He was writing a sermon one morning—and his sermons tended always now towards a single truth—and suddenly he knew that he was face to face with a maddening thought. It had to be looked in the eyes and defeated. He laid down his pencil and stared at it. He stood up, trembling slightly.

"If," said the thought, "you can compel yourself towards this love for your fellows, ought you not to make yourself love them all equally with Mary—especially Honor? You are freeing yourself of every impatience and every fastidiousness in order to be able to love one person flawlessly; will not this process, when completed, emancipate you from the small man's selection of one, and free you to love all equally with her? Perhaps you have been called all your life to nothing less than this, and she was but sent to touch you with power."

"What? Lift all to her level so that she becomes but one of a multitude?"

"Yes," answered the thought.

It was withering him: the face of the enemy had the face of truth. It had attacked from in front this time; not from the dark recesses of the old character, but on the sunny open road of the new. He couldn't do it—why had the thought come to him? Ah, this thinking was a disease. In the power of her name, lift the others to her place and reduce her to one of a multitude—where had he got to? But if it were the truth for him—oh, he must get this thought out of the way for ever, or it would return to terrify him again. Tortured—hardly knowing what he was doing—he hurried from the house, took out his car, and drove. An automaton drove that car, savagely but with a somnambulist's skill; drove it from Thames-mouth to London, and southward from London to Sussex; while the man above the automaton wrestled with his enemy,

and wrestled, and wrestled—now up, now down. It looked so true; it looked so like the call to that final sanctity of which he had always dreamed. *Must* he do it. Must he give up Mary—by raising the others to her level?

“Consider,” said the thought, exaggerating all things: “you are middle-aged, and she is a child—when will you wake up to it? You will never have her. Would it not be better to lift your love from a passionate lover’s to a passionless saint’s?”

He dropped his head over the wheel. Nothing in the world, nothing in time would ever change this iron fact of his age. Good to die, and wait on the other side of death till she should be his equal in age; or till she should join him beyond death, where age had no meaning. . . .

“But you are shirking the fight. You have retreated to old ground. If you are to love all equally with her, what will she be in eternity? But one of the multitude.”

“Then I will not do it. I want to spend eternity alone with her. . . . It is asking too much of me. I cannot do this.”

He must have driven seventy miles. Already he was on Sussex roads, and in a few minutes would be passing the lane that led to Albourne. Here it was, and he could see the roof of Sheep’s Eye Cottage to which he had brought Honor on the evening of their elopement—oh, have pity, God; have pity! And there was the noble shape of Wolstonbury, round as the top of a world. All thought suspended, in a dull leaden head, he turned the car towards Hurst, where he had been a young schoolmaster in the days—those oddly pitiable days—before Mary appeared. He drove through by-lanes to Danny Farm, and stopped the car under a barn-house wall. As the engine died, and he stepped out, he remarked how the rooks were cawing in the woods of Danny. He walked along the cart-track that led to the beechwood; it was before his eyes, the beechwood where he had lain with her in the dog’s-mercury leaves. Its trees were bare as besoms on this March day, and the giant bowl of Wolstonbury, lifting behind, was dull in its winter green. Right of him billowed the line of the Downs, but a mist erased their distance, and Chanctonbury could not be seen. Left of him lay the field which had been ablow with oats that day, and now was overturned by the plough.

Not at once did he go into the wood. He stood and looked

up at Wolstonbury. He was creating a picture: a picture of himself and Jill sitting up there, on one of England's last days of peace, and telling each other their creeds. He had been saying to her something like this:

"Jill, my dear, I have been struggling for months past with a thought which I can't get into words. I can only *see* it. But these downs help me to see it in a sort of parable. There are two kinds of beauty before us now, aren't there?"

"Are there?" Jill had inquired, with her eyebrows humorously arched.

"Yes. Of course there are! There's the rather luxuriant beauty down in the valley there—a matter of flowers and orchards and small, individual things, and all rather lush. And then there's the graver, lonelier, bleaker beauty of these bare downs—a matter of line and mass and shadow. We climb from one to the other. Well, I'm wondering whether the higher beauty oughtn't to be more satisfying, just because it's spacious and impersonal and lonely. And perhaps this wide un-individual beauty of the bare hills is only a step towards some austerer beauty still—I mean, the beauty of the ice-fields, and so on, up and up, to the completest beauty of *all*, which is—I don't know—something bleaker and colder than *poor* human minds dare imagine."

That was what he had said up there. Must he go up towards those ice-fields now—in the power of Mary's name? Must he need her less, and sink her in others, because his love had overcome self? Must he need her not at all, because he loved her perfectly? . . . It was a vision rather wonderful; it would be cold on the ice-fields, but very exhilarating.

But first . . . but wait. . . . He entered the wood and walked up the winding track till he came to the mossy path which led into the hollow where they had lain. "I must remember the exact spot," he had said to her. "Let's see: it's the largest of the beech trunks with three unhappy yews around. I may return here one day, a sentimental ghost." Not like this, had he foreseen his return! There it was, the great bole of the tree, with its three unhappy yews, and—an hour ago he had imagined he would fling himself down upon the dead leaves and let his heart break over them—but he was feeling nothing.

Nothing.

The place was not wounding him at all; only the enemy

was stunning him. Because he could not grieve the enemy was annihilating all his assurance of love; and with its fall went everything. No need to worry about the full claims of sanctity; all striving was over.

For a minute he accepted this; and he sat down dully, where he had hoped to fall prostrate and weep.

"It's all so simple, Mary. I had a tenderness for you, but little else. Everything else was dream; not truth. I must accept it, and then I shall be free of you—my beloved—and free from all strain. It's perfectly simple—not a matter worthy of these miseries—and yet—and yet I would like to die."

But with desire for death came the thought that his death would hurt her and then the certainty that he would endure anything rather than hurt her—and at once he was hoping again and happy again. It was all back: the assurance, the amazement at his previous doubt, the happy need to strive, and the problem as to the goal of his striving. Give her up, by raising the others to her level? No, never. All his being cried out that it would never suffer this—and he laid the palm of his hand on the place where she had lain. If he tried to break past this last resistance he would go mad. He must allow a little to the hungry human in him. Somehow—in some way now almost incomprehensible—he had contrived to make of Mary a distant star to which his whole life turned, and he must keep her there. Perhaps no other man had suffered quite the same experience as this. Perhaps no other man would understand it, if told. But it was *his* experience. He, being what he was—he, being the child of all his past—*had* to believe that he had loved enduringly. This idea had fixed itself in his life, and it *had* to find its satisfaction, and its rest. And it had found it, had it not? . . . O Mary, yes.

When he rose he was nearer peace.

CHAPTER IV

A CHARGE

AND so, gradually, the healing came. It came with a deeper and deeper knowledge of himself. Straining ever to understand this maddening cycle of doubt, denial, despair and then assurance and amazement at the doubt, he would probe his whole life to its earliest days. And he saw that from the dawn of intelligent, separate life he had been searching for the place of healing—searching—searching—and never finding it; never “arriving” and resting. Perhaps this search had its root in the inadequacy of a tired, disheartened mother’s response to him, her youngest child. It was noteworthy that a similar search was present in Peggy, the next youngest, but absent in Joyce, the eldest but one. This search had been disappointed by all, till now he was impotent to believe in its success, if he saw it. The impotence enlarged the puniest fear into an emotional terror that had no justice in reason. Mary, he believed, would have cured that impotence by the perfection of her response; but he had been dragged from her just as the process was beginning, and just as he had overthrown his character, violently, in a desperate effort to reach her. Let him only believe—let him only know that she would have been an answer to his search, and he was safe.

But while his reason construed the torment thus, his soul accepted it as punishment. For that which, in reason’s eye, is an inevitable sequence, to the soul’s eye can be remedial correction. The soul will look upon these things with a different slant from reason; and so it must always be, for full men, till world dilemmas are composed.

His conflict stilled, all the energy which it had drained away was released for a more perfect realization that he had lost Mary; and of that agony we do not speak. Except only to

say that it drove him, in the end, a little nearer to God. There issued from it the knowledge that he must protect jealously, and slowly increase, all that made for good in Mary's coming, if he was to give a beauty to this last anguish in memory and save it from darkness. And if he took this last high hurdle pluckily, he would give the good some increase.

It is to be understood, then, how Tony became a kindly priest, humble, sad and humorous. The mental sickness, falling from him, left only the knowledge that Mary was the one person whom he had loved enduringly; and the will to service. He would never be a good priest, for he had far too many doubts; but he believed he had some truths to tell his people, and one more strongly than any other; a simple truth, perhaps, but it was one thing to see these truths with the brain, and another thing to experience them in the life; one did not know them till one had lived them. His truth was this: that all men in their inmost hearts desired more than all else to love perfectly, and nearly all men failed; and the fault was not in the love but in themselves, because they would not strive to make of themselves vessels large enough to hold it. Full love came only to the worthy. This was the substance of all his preaching, and it was the substance of his life.

Many people loved him now.

He still indulged the old irrational hope. It was early summer, and Mary had long been back in Canada, but still he could not hear the postman clicking the gate without the old hope stirring. One day, as a letter clapped to the floor, he ran to pick it up, hoping he knew not what. As always, it gave him the mild disappointment; it was a long envelope with the imprint of the Bishop's Palace, Coleborough. He took the envelope, a bulky packet, into his study and his chair, and broke it. He had not read three lines before he leapt up in anger. It was written by the Bishop's own hand, in manifest pity and affection, and it told him of a serious charge lodged against him by certain of the laity. A copy of their evidence was enclosed. It concluded: "My dear son, if, after having read the evidence, you will want to come and talk to me about it, please come at once. I am waiting to hear all that you will say, and I feel confident that you will be able to rebut this charge. In sincere affection, your Father in God, Wilfrid Coleborough."

Dumbfounded, but, most curiously, not without a lift of

pleasurable excitement such as danger always raised in him, he read the charge and the evidence. Great God, how long had this been going on? How long had people been spying on him? The charge, "submitted with the greatest sorrow, and only out of a deep sense of duty to the Church," by the wardens of St. Wilfrid's, Christopher Scrase and William Bray, was one of adultery, and the evidence alleged that he had spent the night of September the 12th, of the previous year, at an hotel in London with a woman not his wife. It was the evidence of office clerks, a waiter, a chambermaid, and a visitor at the hotel.

"Honor." He stood at the door and called again. "Honor!"

Honor, sensing alarm in his voice, came quickly, and turned white as she saw that his body was shaking.

"What is the matter?"

He beckoned her to come in and closed the door.

"Read this."

She dropped to the edge of a chair, and read it.

"Tony!"

"You know all about it—how much of it is true—and how much a lie."

"Oh, Tony, what are you going to do?"

"I have decided. I shall ask for an audience with the Bishop at once, in the presence of these people, and I shall tell them the truth. Do you—do you mind?"

Honor, after looking frightened, suddenly jumped up brightly. "No, no! Of course that's best. It'll be difficult to make them understand, but they will—they *must*. Oh, Tony, and you gave her up for me! . . ." Her finger flew to her mouth as she thought. "And, Tony, you must let me come with you, and I'll tell them that you told me everything, and that I *wanted* you to go to her. Oh, can't we go *now*? Can't we do something?"

She went to the door and grasped the handle.

"I'm going this minute to see the Scrases and tell them how wrong they are. . . . Oh, why didn't they talk to me before they took such a wicked step? . . . I'll go now—may I?"

"Bless you." He kissed her. "But," added he with a wry smile, "you won't convince the Alderman of my innocence; he has too high a sense of duty."

Honor, a pale and shaken Honor, sped away on her mission,

while Tony, impatient for action, went to his desk and snatched fumblingly at pen and paper. He wrote with difficulty. His head had become tight, and though words and sentences danced within its dull-walled prison, they would not issue in forms that he could accept and pass. They seemed rhetorical and guilty; or rude; or cold. His final letter was no more than three lines petitioning for a meeting with the Bishop in the presence of his accusers.

Then he went to his easy chair, and held his pipe between his teeth with both hands.

Why did Heaven smite you like this, just when you were trying to be good? It made no difference what you tried to be; the past came home for payment. Curious how set was his desire to be tolerant and humorous and forgiving. He could feel no disappointment with Heaven, nor vindictiveness against the Alderman; he could even admire that majestic old fool. Curious, too, how much he had cast of his pride and his "personalness." One's good name no longer seemed the most important thing in the world, as it had seemed all through the war. This threat was frightening him certainly; but a year ago it would have shrivelled him. . . . Not now.

Honor, returning, put an end to his thoughts.

"Well, child, what success?"

"I don't know," she sighed, sitting down and slowly drawing off her gloves. "He says that of course he'll hear what you have to say in the presence of the Bishop. But I don't think he sees himself withdrawing his charge. He was terribly wordy about his consideration for me——"

"Oh, yes," interrupted Tony; "I can hear that part."

"And Mrs. Scrase was quite unpardonably kind, holding my hand in hers as if she pitied me. She, I am sure, has no doubt of your guilt."

"Of course she hasn't; nor that her noble, incorruptible husband must do his duty, however painful."

"Horrible, horrible old man!" exclaimed Honor.

Tony laughed. "It's funny, but I can't think him horrible. I've been considering the matter in a mood of godlike detachment and I've come to the conclusion that he's a rather splendid old nincompoop."

"I've come to the conclusion that he's a loathsome old pig," said Honor.

The following morning Paston announced, "There's a man wants to see you, sir."

Tony looked up from his desk. "What man?"

"He came to the back door, sir, with a lady. Says his name is Wylie, and you'll know him all right."

"Oh, Wylie, is it? What does he want?"

"I don't know, sir. He particularly requested that I should say he hadn't come to ask for anything. Just a private matter that would interest you, if you could spare him ten minutes."

"Well." Tony stood up to receive visitors. "Let them come in."

Tib Wylie entered, giving a lady-like "Thank you" to Paston, who had held open the door for her. Joe followed. Tib was arrayed in all her full-blown best, as if for a visit of some dignity, and she had probably given some pains to her husband, who looked unusually smart in a celluloid collar, bow tie, and sabbath suit of dark blue. She screwed up her short-sighted eyes at this sumptuous parlour; and Joe, made a little nervous by it, passed his bowler hat under his moustache, left and right.

"Very nice of you to come and see me," greeted Tony. "Do sit down."

"I 'ope your man made it clear that we ain't come to ask for anything," said Joe sitting, with deference, on the edge of one arm-chair, while his wife arranged herself, with lady-like ease, in another.

"Yes," agreed Tib, richly explanatory and sympathetic. "You must be always being bothered like that. I meanter say! Some people have no feelin's, and no shame."

"Paston explained that it was private," said Tony, who had drawn up a chair.

"Is *he* your batman nah, sir?"

"Something like that, Joe."

"Well, I reckon you've made a change for the better, sir, if you arst me." This being almost a joke, Joe laid a coy bowler hat over his mouth, and then began his business. "Well, sir, it's like this—it's like this—strike me, it's difficult to say it, Tib, now we've come."

Mrs. Wylie rustled with understanding, and decided that she must address her own competent hands to the difficulty. "We hope you won't take it as a liberty, sir, but we heard abaht this charge they're bringin' against yer, and we thought we'd

like to come round and offer you our sympathy in person—if you take my meanin’.”

“Yuss.” Joe corroborated this. “We thought we’d write it at first, but it didn’t come easy.”

“Oh, you’ve both heard about it, have you?” Nothing in Tony’s manner showed the wounded fluttering of his heart.

“Christ, yes——” began Joe.

But Mrs. Wylie took him up quickly. “Just one or two have spoken abaht it, sir—in confidence like; and Joe and I have properly seen ’em ’ome, you may be sure. We’ve said we don’t believe a word of it, ’aven’t we, Joe?”

“*Course* we ’ave!”

“What’s the story you’ve heard then, Joe?”

“Only that that there Scrase had laid a charge against you for—wurl, you know what, sir—and that the case would be comin’ on soon. When I heard it was ’im, I made sure you was innocent.”

“We’d have bin sure of it any’ow,” corrected Tib Wylie.

“*Yurse*,” agreed Joe, accepting this hint and lying splendidly. “*Yurse*; o’ *course*! But ain’t it funny, sir—what gets me, sir, is this. He caught me and did for me, and now he’s after you. Queer, ain’t it?”

For the first time Tony remembered Kit. “I suppose we’ve managed somehow to put ourselves in his toils, Joe.”

“Yes; and we’re the only two people as knows about Captain Scrase; and his father’s downed both of us. There’s something queer about it.”

It certainly did seem queer as Tony thought about it. There was silence.

“Tell ’im yore idea,” prompted Tib.

“Well, sir, I don’t see why he should be allowed to ’ave it all his own way. I don’t, straight. And I was going to suggest that, if you’d allow me, I’d go rahnd and tell ’im a thing or two.”

“No, Joe.”

“Jest wait, sir: I ain’t finished yet. I don’t mean that I’d threaten to make it public, all abaht Captain Scrase, but that I’d tell ’im the story and how good you was to his boy at the end, and how the Captain’d turn in his grave if he knew that his father was doin’ this to you; and if after that he didn’t take back his charge, then he’s a dirtier old——” Joe hesitated, and decided to hold back the word—“a dirtier old man than I took him for. How does that strike you, sir?”

Tony thought. "No," he repeated. "The point isn't that Captain Scrase's story should not be published, but that his father and mother should never hear it. . . . No, I couldn't tell them, and you couldn't either. You've only got to think of Captain Scrase, and you know you couldn't."

"I'm not sure," mused Joe. "I wouldn't care to tell his mother; I don't want to 'urt *her*, silly old geezer though she is——"

"Oh, Joe, you *are* awful," reproached his wife.

"That's all right, Tib; Captain O'Grogan understands *me*. And the old man'd never tell her, sir, you can bet your life on that—so *she'd* be all right. But I wouldn't mind putting '*im* wise about a thing or two, if it'd save you, sir. There, sir, I've said it!"

"And, sir—if you'll excuse me buttin' in"—this was Tib Wylie—"I agree with Joe. I do. I ain't got a 'a'porth of sympathy for that old man—not a 'a'porth. In fact I'd like to see him put in his place, and that's the truth, if you kill me for it." She rustled with conviction. "If it's you or '*im*, sir, then I'm for you. You was good to Captain Scrase and you was good to Jow, and *I*——" the rest was muffled because Tib was blowing her nose. "I stands by my friends, anyhow, yuss," said she, as she dabbed her eyes.

"Yurse!" endorsed Joe.

"Give '*im* all he arsts for, *I* say," continued Tib, rearranging her handkerchief into a ball.

"No," objected Tony. "He's an old man. Let him be."

"Tryin' to 'ound you out of the church!" protested Tib indignantly, but to the empty air before her.

"Well, sir, it's for you to say," Joe decided.

"Crool!" murmured Mrs. Wylie, to the air.

"No, Joe. Nothing doing," said Tony.

"Worth a 'undred of '*im*, any day," pronounced Mrs. Wylie to her unseen confidant.

"That's settled, then, is it, sir?" asked Joe.

"Yes."

"Right! Nah we've got Battalion Orders." He accepted it philosophically, and shoved his hands into his pockets.

"I hope someone does for '*im*," muttered Mrs. Wylie, as a last shot. "I do devahtly. Yuss."

She recovered, put her handkerchief in her bag, and addressed

herself to Tony. "Of course you understand we don't believe it. Or, if we did, we shouldn't think so much the worse of you either. After all! . . ."

"Yurse," agreed Joe, emphatically.

"I meanter say!" explained Tib; and left her meaning in those words.

"Well, I can only tell you"—Tony tried to laugh—"that I'm not guilty of the charge as it's framed. Whether I shall be able to prove my innocence I don't know. But if I tell you this, you'll believe it, won't you?"

"Absolutely, sir," Joe affirmed, smartly as a soldier. "Absolutely! You say so, and there's an end of it. And it's the same for my old Trouble-and-Strife here. Ain't it, Tib?"

"O' course!"

"And will they"—Joe's eyes lit up with interest—"will they try you in a sort of court? Because, if so, the missus and I thought we'd like to be there, if you could get us a seat. We thought we'd like to be kinda sittin' among your friends."

"It may not come to that."

"I see." One felt that Joe, in seeing, was slightly disappointed. "Because I'd have guaranteed to raise a hell of a cheer when they acquitted yer, even though I was escorted aht of the court."

"I'm sure you would, Joe," laughed Tony.

"Well"—Mrs. Wylie, who was apt to take command on state occasions, stood up—"I expect you won't want us to be botherin' you any more at a time like this. Come on, Joe. All we can do is to wish you the very best of luck. The very best."

"Yussir," said Joe. "Every time!"

"It's extraordinarily kind of you," Tony acknowledged. "I hardly know how to thank you for coming like this."

"That's nothin', sir. *That's* nothin'. Don't you worry about that."

"Delighted, I'm sure," echoed Tib.

"And if anyone says anything to us, we'll tell 'em to shut it. We'll tell 'em that there's nothin' in it; and we 'appen to know."

"Thank you, Joe. And not a word about Captain Scrase to anyone."

"Not a word on this side o' Jordan, sir. You trust *me!*"

Tony held the door open for the lady, who sailed out with a

"Thank you," her husband following. From his window he watched them as they went down the garden drive, Tib tossing her head in satisfaction that the sentiments had been honoured, and Joe rather ashamed of himself and therefore whispering a bashful jocosity into her ear.

While Tony was granting his audience to Joe and Tib Wylie, a comely woman of forty, with a face fresh and young, was sitting in a local train as it ambled between Southend and Thamesmouth. "Comely" was the word that most people would have used to describe her, but she, Peggy, would not have liked to hear it. They might desire no difference in her, but she desired a difference of ten, fifteen or twenty pounds. This deduction would probably have spoiled her contours and detracted from her charm; she half knew that it would spoil the contours and the charm, both of which she valued highly; and yet she could not stop desiring it. She could not escape her dread of losing slimness and becoming what she called "a fine woman." Better to be just a shade less attractive than fine. Sometimes, since she was nothing but the full flower of the conscience-harried child of thirty years before, she would wonder how far this desire for slimness accorded with her desire for sanctity; and whether she sinned in giving so much thought to her figure, and in taking more time over her bedroom exercises than she took over her bedroom prayers. Especially as she performed these rather ridiculous exercises only behind a closed door; stopped them with a guilty immediacy if she heard Michael approaching; and was busy expunging the last traces of them when he entered. But on the whole, she thought not; she forgave most people their venial sins with an infinite readiness—and sometimes, unlike her God, their mortal ones too—and she was inclined to forgive this one to Peggy O'Grogan. (In such contexts as these, Peggy always thought of herself as Peggy O'Grogan.) And anyhow, whether she forgave it or not, she was quite sure that it was going on.

She was thinking now of that child of thirty years ago. Impatient with the slowness of the train, she gazed from the window but without sight of the flat meadows or the occasional sea. She was remembering her bedroom in the Kensington home that night after Tony had disgraced himself at school and

promptly lost himself in London. She had lain in bed, eyes open in the dark, wondering how Keatings, Joyce and Derek could so enjoy the excitements of the search instead of projecting themselves into the runaway's mind and suffering with him. Which was what she had immediately done, with much passion and prayer.

And that child had become this buxom woman sitting in the train; and Tony had become a grey, distinguished priest; and none the less she could wonder, as the train dawdled on, whether the thirty years had wrought so much difference in either of them. Great differences in degree, no doubt, but little in kind. Tony had plunged then into an impossible love and floundered thereafter in social shame; and she had truly captured his suffering for herself and longed (not without a keen appreciation of her nobility) to be the perfect sister. And what was happening now? Probably his love was more real this time, even as her longing to go to him was more pure; but the same two children were at work.

When, some months before, Michael had returned from a Diocesan Conference to tell her of whisperings about Tony and Mary Leith, she had dismissed them summarily.

"I never believe anything I hear about parsons. And if they are successful parsons, I believe still less."

But in her heart she had suspected that they might be true; and in her self-analysis she had perceived, with much interest, and some self-approval, that she was feeling neither shock nor condemnation. Why?

Peggy's elbow found the window-ledge, and her soft face chaired itself in her worn hand. She watched the country coming nearer; but soon the telegraph wires mesmerized her from sight of it, as they switchbacked everlastingly from pole to pole. "If," she pondered, remembering an old conversation with Tony, "she were to love another man than Michael, and love him so well that she was enlarged and sanctified by the love, would she go to him?" And as she pictured herself going to him, all that hunger to find the perfect thing, which had haunted the lives of Peggy and Tony, seemed to swell up into an ecstasy of conviction. Yes . . . if Michael were to be good about it, she would go where she could give more. Her heart speeded with this dream, and her brain scintillated with a thrilling joy—and then she knew that she wouldn't go. She wouldn't go, because her life was fixed on Christ, and she

would accept His ruling. But Tony's was not, for all his priesthood. His unresting intellect would not allow it to fix there. Christ was not the magnetic north for him, holding him to goodness. And possibly this Mary was.

When Michael's story reached her, she had debated whether to go and tell Tony of everybody's beastliness, but, knowing that Mary Leith was gone now to her home at the other end of the world—so Peggy conceived of Canada—she decided that the rumour would pass and be heard of no more, and it would be kindest not to distress him with words of her. Instead she took refuge in daily prayers for them both. That sweet girl!—her thoughts were as much with Mary as with her brother. It didn't seem right, in Peggy's extraordinary dialectic, that anyone who did such a kindness to the world by being so beautiful should be asked to suffer like the rest of us.

And then, this very morning, a woman of Southend had made whisper of a charge against Tony; and, half an hour later, another woman had repeated the whisper; and Peggy had rushed home to Michael for his denial—or confirmation. "I've known all about that for ages," Michael had said; and something in the levity of his answer had shown her that, so far from being perturbed, he was even pleased.

Reproach could have burst from her in tears. "Oh, why, why didn't you tell me?" she demanded, with hands clenching.

"I thought it would upset you," said Michael. "I hoped it'd blow over, without reaching your ears."

Hoped—*bab!* she did not say what she thought, but ran out of the room. What was she to do? Oh, what, *what?* A letter? But how wait two days for an answer? A telegram? But how say in a telegram all that she was burning to say? The telephone? No, no, no. One compulsive idea occupied her mind—and spread—and spread. She had to yield to it. She ran upstairs, packed a hand-bag, tossed the next week's house-keeping to the cook, ran to Southend Station and took the first train, a slow local, to Thamesmouth. And now as the meadows told her that the train was drawing near to Thamesmouth, she framed the words with which she would explain her arrival to Honor and Tony: "Please, I've come to stay. I want to be with you both."

CHAPTER V

A TRIAL

THE Gothic door of the Bishop's Palace, with its Gothic bell, was raising some vague but interesting ideas in Tony, when a spruce maid, not the least Gothic, answered his summons and drew the door open. She led them, Tony and Honor, along a church-like corridor and showed them into the drawing-room, where she left them.

If the corridor had been sombre and semi-sacred this big drawing-room was entirely cheerful and profane. If the corridor had been a little like Alderman Scrase (thought Tony) this room was a little like Sister Joyce: not modern or original, but happy. The broad field of floor was covered with a white Indian carpet; the sofas and chairs were petticoated in a frolicsome cretonne, all roses and leaves and birds; the top of the grand piano was alight with silver frames; and a fire (the Bishop and his wife were old) danced and purred in the brassy grate. Three tall windows, their curtains strained back, added three pictures of lawns and flower-beds to the brightness of the room.

Tony looked around. "H'm," laughed he, since he must hide any nervousness, "as a setting for my trial it is somewhat inapt."

"What lovely flowers!" exclaimed Honor, who must also deny the quivering of her heart.

Flowers were everywhere: purple irises, red carnations, white roses, yellow roses, purple tulips, pink tulips and deep red wallflowers.

"A good show for my funeral," ventured Tony; and just then the Bishop came in.

His violet cassock and bright pectoral cross brought the scene a little nearer to aptness. But not his manner. A thin little

ancient man, with a dried face but alert and kindly eyes that were forgiving the world most things before they turned from it, he studied to keep the talk away from all unanswered charges and as natural and happy as might be. He discussed the garden with Tony, and made a few little jokes with Honor.

He did not have to maintain this generous falsity long, for Mr. Scrase and Mr. Bray were announced. The Alderman, fully dressed for a regrettable duty, came forward and, ceremoniously bowing, shook the Bishop's hand. To Tony and Honor he bowed distantly. Mr. Bray copied him in both these movements, but more awkwardly. Mr. Bray, in fact, was the essential echo to-day.

Five minutes behind these gentlemen came Canon Broadley, palpably ill-at-ease and wondering how to meet this ungenial situation. His method, at present, was to be pleasant with all, to Bishop, Churchwardens and Curate—to judge, prosecution and defence.

The Bishop requested them all to be seated. He sat himself, not as a judge facing his court, but as a father with his family, in a deep arm-chair which turned towards the fire. On the sofa opposite him, Tony, the defendant, and Honor, his sole witness, sat side by side. Mr. Scrase assumed the second arm-chair, one pace behind the Bishop's, and, dropping into it, brought his hands together and interlaced the fingers. Mr. Bray drew up a lighter chair and sat *on* it rather than in it, and stared out at the garden. The Vicar, after wandering a little, found a low, long fauteuil at some distance away; and from this comfortable place, for the rest of the afternoon, watched the realities of life pass by, and was content to be confused.

Without lifting his eyes from the grate, the Bishop said, "Well, Mr. O'Grogan, you will be able to explain everything, I know;" and he closed his eyes. One might believe he closed them for a moment of prayer.

"Yes, my lord," said Tony, and began his story. He told it simply, with no excuses and little comment. "I feel I was guilty in the beginning, my lord, but I fell in love with her and I found it very hard to draw away." Behind his quiet speech his emotions were strangely jumbled; there was a pity for his wife since his words would wound her; there was shame, but less before his own conscience than before the consciences of Alderman and Vicar, who would not understand; and, leaping unashamedly among these, there was that instinctive joy which

the mention of Mary would always light in him. As he spoke, the Alderman stiffened more than once, but the Bishop only fingered his glittering cross and stared into the fire. Honor kept her head bent. Mr. Bray fidgeted on his chair.

But when he came to the events of the last night, Mr. Bray, who had been glancing at pictures or scraping stains from his coat, forgot these matters in a new and keener interest, and fixed his eyes on the narrator.

"I meant her to go at midnight," said Tony, "but I found it too hard at the end, and I kept her as long as I could. . . ."

Voice and words failed him, and the Bishop came to his help.

"Quite so, my boy. . . . The—the evidence says she was seen to leave the hotel very early in the morning . . . crying bitterly."

"Yes. I meant her to go at midnight, but—I loved her——" He was going to say "very dearly," but thought of Honor—"and we sat together till the daylight frightened us."

"I see. . . . And you did no more than sit there together, I am sure?"

"That was all, my lord."

The Alderman spoke: "In each other's embrace, I imagine?"

"Yes, sir," answered Tony.

"Naturally, naturally," murmured the Bishop, somewhat to the Alderman's surprise. "And you say you sat there for a whole night?"

"There was a time when she slept for a little, and I just watched by her side."

"Ah, poor child!" . . . The Bishop sighed over this picture of the sleeping Mary. His hand lifted and sank sadly. "Well . . . the evidence says—you know, my boy, I only want to hear how you meet it—it says that a bed had been slept in."

"When she was gone, my lord, I was very unhappy, and I went and lay down on the outside of the bed with my face in the pillow. I lay there some hours: I could not leave till the hotel was awake and I had settled my account. It was a September morning, and I turned very cold. There was no fire in the room and I drew the bed-clothes over me."

The Bishop nodded. "I see . . . I see . . . And—the evidence suggests that you yourself left the hotel very early, without showing yourself to anyone."

"It is right. I did not want to meet anybody."

"Of course not. . . . Naturally. . . . And you have not seen her since?"

"No, my lord. That was the end."

A silence waited to be broken. Mr. Bray, feeling that he ought to justify his presence, broke it.

"Pardon me, my lord"—and he looked at Honor. "Mr. O'Grogan says that he told all this to you, Mrs. O'Grogan. May we ask, do you accept his story?"

Honor lifted her head. "I *know* it is all true."

The Alderman shifted his position in his chair. Mr. Bray returned to his examining of the pictures. The Vicar sat as he was, staring humpily, and hoping that he would be allowed to remain long in the security of a mere spectator. The Bishop fingered his pectoral cross.

Presently the Bishop replaced the cross in his cincture, and leant forward as if to lay a hand on Honor. "My dear, you can tell us no more. Why not go and walk in the gardens for a while? I think we shall all be with you soon."

Honor murmured her gratitude and went.

The Bishop returned to thought, fingering the cross's cord. When, in time, he spoke, it was to say: "I, too, accept your story, my boy. Naturally I do. But I will reserve any comment of mine for the present. Perhaps Mr. Scrase will tell us what he thinks."

"My lord," began the Alderman, but his voice came huskily. He cleared his throat and freed the voice for an exordium in his best manner. Mr. Bray, meanwhile, rested his hands on his knees and watched his principal. "My lord, to begin with, I must say that it is with almost intolerable regret that I find myself in my present most painful position. I never thought to see myself doing what I am now, and I assure you that nothing but an intense loyalty to the Church would have compelled me to do it. That is so, is it not, Mr. Bray?"

"Eh, what?" exclaimed Mr. Bray, taken by surprise, and then: "Oh, o' course . . . o' course."

"We are sure of it," said the Bishop.

"And for me it has been harder than for Mr. Bray. Mr. O'Grogan was a colleague of my son's in the Great War, and this fact alone almost stayed my hand"—Tony raised his eyes and stared at the speaker—"but, as you will see, other considerations transpired which determined me that such a mere personal matter must give way. I—I, too, will accept

Mr. O'Grogan's story—I cannot do otherwise—but I do not feel—I *cannot* feel—that this justifies us in assuming that the incident is closed. Because, even if Mr. O'Grogan denies the—er—the complete offence, he has confessed to things which, in my judgment, are hardly less blameworthy——”

“Oh, no . . . no,” protested the Bishop.

“That is my view, my lord ; and I cannot alter it.”

“But even if you are right, Mr. Scrase, we can forgive, can we not ? If his dear wife has forgiven him——”

“The two cases are hardly parallel. Mrs. O'Grogan, I take it, thinks of her husband only as a man ; we have to think of him as a minister ; and it is our duty, as I see it, to ensure that the clergy who minister the sacraments to us have private lives that are above reproach. A married priest and a young girl—it is intolerable, my lord ! And there is another aspect : it is our duty to see that the clergy who enjoy the emoluments of our Church do not betray it by teaching and writing things that are the diametrical opposite of everything they are paid to preach. Mr. O'Grogan, in his sermons and his writings——”

The Bishop shook his head. “They are not relevant to this charge, Mr. Scrase. They are a different question, surely. We may not agree with Mr. O'Grogan's opinions—I do not myself—but I am an old man, and I can believe that new ideas must be tried out in a new world. No, his published opinions are not to the point—just now.”

The Alderman warmed. “They seem to me entirely to the point. When it comes to Mr. O'Grogan advocating——”

“If you will forgive me,” interrupted the Bishop, “is it not rather my province to see that sound doctrine——”

“And is it not our province ?”—Mr. Scrase raised his voice : he never liked to be argued with, and he was exasperated, confused, that the Bishop should not be wholly on the side of him who was so wholly in the right—“if you will allow me to continue, my lord, is it not our province to make representations to you when treachery, as we conceive it, is being taught, and—apparently—practised ? When it comes to Mr. O'Grogan advocating adultery to a youth within the walls of his church——”

“*What ?*” exclaimed Tony.

Mr. Bray's eyes, which had wandered during the discussion on ecclesiastical discipline, now came smartly back to attention.

Mr. Scrase turned to Tony. “You may remember a young

man seeking your advice, after Evensong one night, in the matter of some wretched intrigue——”

“I should not phrase it like that,” said Tony, warming too. “His was an unhappy story, and he only wanted to do what was right.”

“*Tch!*” objected the Alderman.

“But has he, then, told you what I said?”

“It came out in conversation. He was arguing with me the rights and wrongs of a divorce from his poor young wife, and when I told him that such a step was not to be contemplated for a moment, he threw it into my face that all clergy did not agree with me. He told me what you had said.”

“What did you say, my boy?” asked the Bishop.

“I told him, as far as I can remember, that it was all quite simple. I said that, if he just left it to the best that was in him, his difficulty would solve itself in time. I said that his love, in the end, would do exactly what it was worth.”

“And what did you mean by that?”

“That was only another way of saying, as I showed him, that he must leave it to the Mind of God, which would reveal itself in the end.”

“*Tch!*” came from the Alderman.

“But we already have the Mind of God in this matter—surely?” the Bishop submitted. “It has been given to us by our Master, has it not?”

As Tony was not prepared to argue this, the Alderman was left in occupation of the ground. “Exactly! Precisely!” he exclaimed, much relieved that the Bishop should be coming over to the right side. “And to teach anything else to our Young People is—in my judgment—treachery. I cannot say less. And I feel this so strongly that, were Mr. O’Grogan to leave this diocese and seek employment elsewhere, I should feel—yes, certainly I should!—I should feel compelled to make my representations to any bishop to whom he might apply——”

“No.” The Bishop shook his head, aggrieved. “That would be wrong, I think.”

“I have told you that I do not take as lenient a view as you, my lord,” affirmed the Alderman, heating again. “I have my convictions, and though I am old, I intend to—er—to fight for them. As long as I have life I shall join issue with the pernicious modern ideas that are sapping our national life at this time.” Canon Broadley did not glance up at this

plagiarism : possibly because he was quite unaware that he ever used the phrase. "Up to the end I intend to do all in my power to maintain the old standards of clean, straight living."

The Bishop, watching, came to the decision that Mr. Scrase would rest on this peroration. He turned towards Tony.

"As I have told you, my boy, I accept the whole of your story. And it seems to me that there are three courses before you. One is that nothing be done, that this charge be withdrawn, and that you should go on quietly with your work in your parish, doing it better, I am sure, because you have erred and have suffered. Yes, and with your dear wife at your side——"

"My lord," interrupted the Alderman.

The Bishop lifted his hand ; and his jewelled ring sparkled in the light from the window. "Permit me a few minutes more, Mr. Scrase. This is the course that I should like best, but it would be difficult—exceedingly difficult. Unfortunately the story of this charge has become known—how I do not know—over the whole diocese, and your position among us, therefore, would be very uncomfortable."

"We could make it equally well known that the charge had been withdrawn," suggested Tony.

"That is what I would wish. Indeed, that is what I shall do. But Prebendary Broadley, and these gentlemen, have something to say as to whether the matter can stop there. After all, my boy, you must remember that they have some justification for the step they have taken. Again, there is the question whether you can do your best among us any more. It is the work that matters, is it not?"

Tony said nothing.

"The second course would be for you to resign your curacy, and leave this diocese—this province, even. But I am not happy about that. A sudden resignation would persuade people that this charge was true, and you are not in the full sense guilty. I know you are not ; and you tried to do what was right, both of you—poor children. I don't like to think of judgment going against you by default."

"I understand, my lord."

"There is a third course : you could be arraigned at your own request before the Consistory Court, and there answer this charge with the story you have told us. . . . But I am so afraid you could get no other verdict than guilty. Consider,

my boy: your layman's clothes, the bed, the child slipping away early in the morning before the hotel was astir—and, added to this, the well-known fact that your books advocate a certain liberty. . . . Of course, if the child herself——”

“That is impossible, my lord.”

“I know . . . yes. . . . And then, again: even if you were acquitted, the story of your partial guilt would remain, and the suspicion of much more, and it would all have a terrible publicity. I don't think you will want to drag your wife—or your Church—through that.”

“No, my lord.”

“And so, after much thought, I cannot help feeling that my second suggestion would be the happiest and wisest for you: that you should, of your own free will, resign and seek a new sphere, perhaps in the Northern Province, even though—ah, but we will do all in our power—all of us, I am sure—to combat the tale that you were really guilty. I most certainly shall. . . . Now what do you say?”

Tony hesitated before answering: the eyes of all waited upon him.

Perhaps it was the old combative Tony who spoke first.

“I think I prefer your first suggestion, my lord; that things remain as they are. I am not guilty, and I am prepared to face any scandal there may be. There is always scandal.”

The Bishop looked towards the Vicar.

“And what does Prebendary Broadley say to that?”

“I”—the Vicar, alarmed, corrected some of his limpness in the chair. “I—I will accept whatever may be your lordship's ruling in this matter. Of course.”

“And Mr. Scrase and Mr. Bray—will they consent to no further steps being taken?”

“No.” The Alderman's answer was not immediate, but it was emphatic when it came. “No. After mature consideration, I do not feel willing to go as far as that. I have tried to be very fair, but you force me to say it: the case is blacker against Mr. O'Grogan than he has allowed to appear.”

“I have told the truth,” said Tony.

“That may be, but not in any detail. Have you told his lordship of your behaviour in a beechwood under the South Downs?”

Again Mr. Bray's attention came quickly home from a period of wandering.

"What do you mean?" asked Tony.

"Mr. O'Grogan used to live in those parts, my lord, and he was easily recognized; and the tale came round to us, just when we were considering our present step. It contributed, I may say, not a little to my decision."

"What is this, my boy?" inquired the Bishop. "You will explain it, I am sure."

"It is simple," said Tony. "Mr. Scrase does not seem to realize that I loved this girl. I lay with her in the beechwood and kissed her." He hesitated and gulped. The thought of the beechwood had tightened his throat. "We lay there together for a long time."

"Yes. Precisely," said the Alderman.

"We lay there for the whole of a summer day," added Tony. "Precisely."

At the Bishop, after thought, nodded his head. He sighed softly, and turned to the Alderman with a small, sad smile. Perhaps there was something of a twinkle in his eyes.

"Well . . . yes . . . yes. . . . We are old, Mr. Scrase, but I suppose we mustn't forget what it was like to be in love."

The Bishop, to say the least of it, perplexed Mr. Scrase. He thrust him into a dark-browed pondering. Mr. Bray was also perplexed, but as he had been interested only in the objective facts of the story, and not in their subjective analysis, he did not ponder the Bishop's laxity, but returned to a consideration of the objective fact of his finger-nails. Canon Broadley, since he had sat himself from the beginning on this side understanding, was not affected.

All were silent. And in that silence Tony built his decision. Suddenly, and only at this moment—such had been the crowding of his thoughts—he remembered his father. His eyes might have strayed to the garden, but he was really seeing the Children's Breakfast Room in the old Vicarage home, and Keatings, Joyce, Derek, Peggy and himself sitting in shocked and sorrowful conclave, on that Saturday afternoon when they heard of their father's shameful elopement. How guilty they had thought him! They had been sorry for him, and Peggy had loved him more for his sinfulness, but none had thought that he had done anything but a completely shameful thing. Had it been so completely shameful after all? From within, these stories could seem so different. How strange that, after

a quarter of a century, his father's story, or much of it, should be repeating itself in him. His father had resigned and gone rather than quicken the impending storm. And all had agreed that he was wise in the interest of all.

Tony was not as guilty as the famous Dr. O'Grogan had been but when he thought of his father, finished with one unreality at least, finished with a long spiritual malaise, he saw what the end of all this would be. And as he saw what he would do, such an uprush of warm pleasure surged in him, such a vista of sunny release stretched before his eyes, that he knew he must have wanted for a long time to do this—that there was a need in him to do it. And if the announcement of it, while satisfying the new character, gave a small glee to the combative Irishman in him, why not? No reason why the monk in him should not be a fighting monk.

He spoke, and all turned to hear him.

"There is yet a fourth course, my lord, which you have not mentioned. It is that I should withdraw, not only from my curacy, but from the ministry too. That is what I shall ask your permission to do."

"Oh, no," protested the Bishop. "No. We shall want you and your work. . . . Mr. Scrase does not desire that."

"I think I desire it, my lord. I think I have desired it for some time. I want to be free to think and write what I like. I do not know how my thoughts may go, but I feel I must be free from these threats of disciplinary action."

"It would be a pity. A great pity," said the Bishop, shaking his head. "Come, Mr. Scrase, you will join me in telling him that you never desired so extreme a step as that."

"I—er——" The Alderman, not having known what he desired, was at a loss for a reply. "No, I think that would have been going too far. I imagined some punishment, and an undertaking from Mr. O'Grogan that he would be more loyal in the future."

"And I cannot give that undertaking. I may want to write in the future many things that would be quite tolerable in a layman, but quite unbecoming—and even disloyal, as Mr. Scrase puts it—in a priest. No, I feel sure that this is the best and wisest step."

"You must not decide on this quickly, my son. If you resign your Orders, there is no returning."

"Is that so?" asked Tony, surprised. "But why?"

I love Canada too. You should see it as it is now. Even I did not know that it could be so marvellous, because this is the first time I have come up the Gulf in the fall. It is two o'clock in the afternoon, and the water is as smooth and quiet as milk, just as it was that night on the *Sagaman*. (Fancy, it is seven o'clock in the evening in England, because we are about five hours earlier than you. I am always thinking out what the time is in England!) As you know, the maples come down to the water's edge on the northern shore, and to-day they are every possible shade from light yellow to deep red; they are orange and russet and crimson and flame, and many other colours that *you* could find words for, but I can't; and the water reflects them all, as the ship moves past, ever so smoothly—oh, I wish one day you could see it just like this, Tony dear! And the firs stand dark and unmoved among it all, and the little white houses of the French-Canadian *habitants* dot themselves all along the coast. Behind, the Laurentian Hills run in a long, leaden range; and in front, as you used to say, the islands seem to swing round in their own quiet lakes, as the ship goes on. It is all so beautiful. I love it, and I am going to love it more and more."

Ah well; we do not know the mystery; we can but take it as it is, and nerve ourselves for loss, and for a silence like the bird-broken silence up here, where the down-crests curve round in the loneliness of the sky. Pass, dearest friend of all. All's well.

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